

# OH! YOU ENGLISH

*By*  
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TO

A LITTLE GIRL IN GREEN . . .  
FOR WEARING MY GARDENIAS



## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

MR. KARAKA has the distinction of being the first Indian to become President of the Oxford Union. In this, his second book, he indicts, in a forthright, uncompromising manner, and with considerable irony, the weaknesses of our Western civilization as they strike a 'Barbarian.' One of our readers has described the book as 'stimulating and gloriously infuriating.'



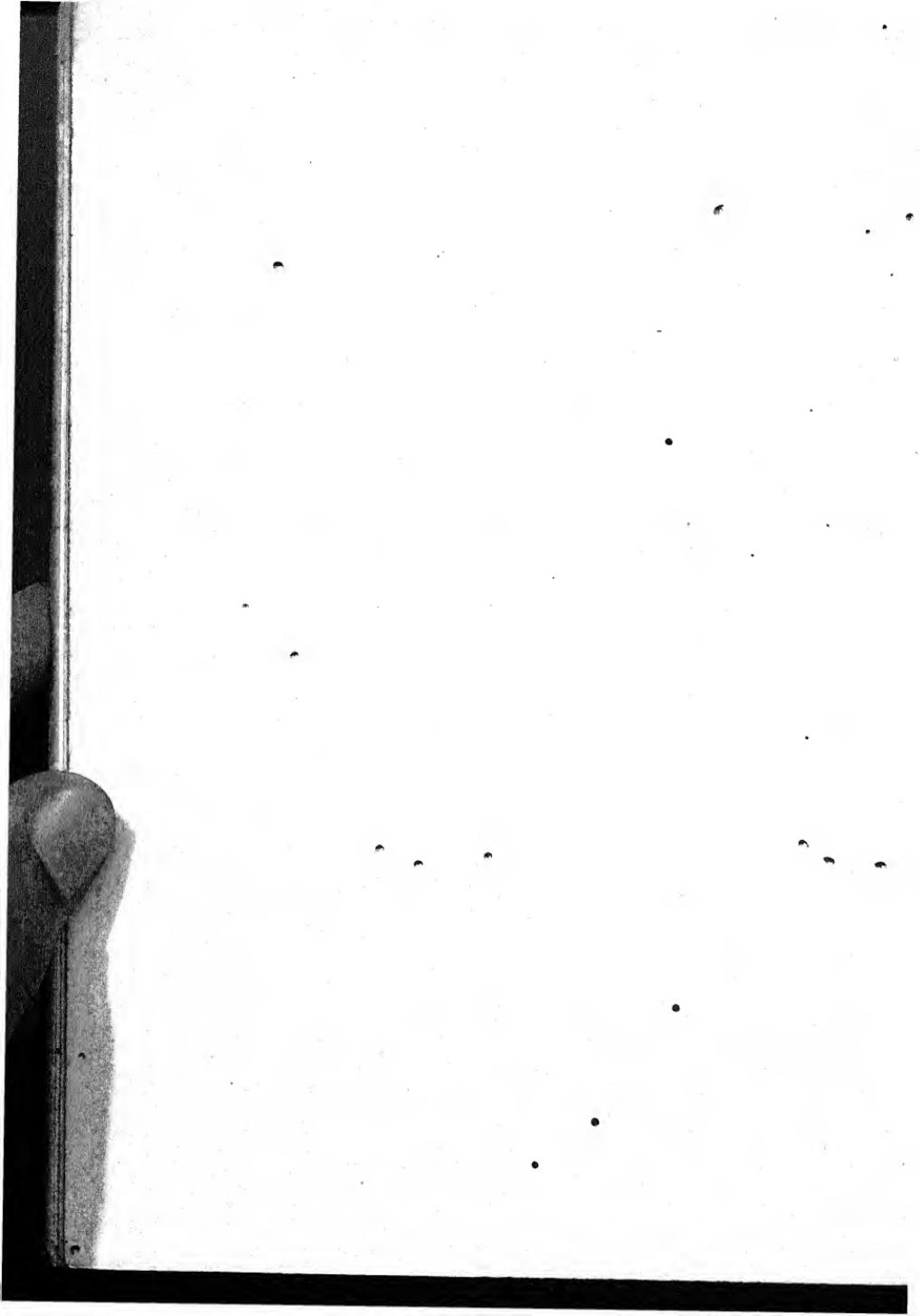
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I

THE BARBARIAN IS BORN



# I

## THE BARBARIAN IS BORN

The history of the world has always been told in terms of its predominant civilizations. It is the exaggerated story of civilized people written and glorified by themselves, giving their own version of what they thought and felt about their own selves, totally disregarding the opinions of those hundreds of thousands of human beings, who although contemporaneous in point of time, are regarded by them as 'backward people' or barbarians.

Historians never preface their collection of recorded events with an apology for their point of view. That would be expecting too much from egoists. It is hardly conceivable that an autobiography by Mr. Bernard Shaw would be prefaced with the cautious reservation that 'the character in this book is entirely bogus!' It is the quint-essence of civilization—as it is of Shavianism—to

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want to leave only a record of its greatness and its majesty long after it has decayed and perished and passed into oblivion by way of Styx and Acheron. Yet this distorted account of history is to be regarded as the one authentic basis on which the generations that follow have to base their judgment.

Boisguillebert erected, somewhere towards the end of the eighteenth century, a barometer of prosperity. The Frenchman's attempt was to lay down some standard by which prosperity could be measured. Every Englishman has consciously or unconsciously created his own barometer for measuring civilization. According as people ate, or ape, the English, so they are civilized. The rest of the world, at one fell swoop—by a sweep of the sword or a sharp stroke of the pen—are christened 'barbarians.'

\* \* \* \*

It is now some four or five years since I came to this lone island of civilization in search of knowledge and culture, and all the refined arts of the ages which this civilization is alleged to have cloistered in its innermost cells. It had named itself. What visions I had conceived from my reading on

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'Civilization,' only Oxford helped to realize. Yet the keynote of that city of dreaming spires was not in its Philistine civilization but in its essential Hellenism, and what civilized people were inclined to regard as a strange intermingling of culture with the anarchy of flaming youth was only the refined romanticism of the early thirties. So that civilization still remained a dream that never came true.

I remember cutting through the Tom Quad of Christ Church one Sunday afternoon on my way to the Meadows. By the fountain was the romantic figure of Einstein. The national fanaticism of this far-flung generation of Hun progenitors had driven out of his fatherland not only the greatest product of Germany but a genius of the age, who held the destiny of the world in the palm of his hand. For, scientifically speaking, the world is or is not as Einstein thinks, finite or infinite as he believes. He is the measure of things which this civilization considers vital. Yet he was a refugee, taking sanctuary in the holy precincts of a Gothic cathedral. And by that fountain he stood, looking wistfully at a pair of pigeons flitting around the waters. What theories of relativity and what contribution to science may have

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emanated from those few moments of silent contemplation, it is not possible to surmise. Nor is it essential from the point of view of 'barbaric' appreciation. It was its appeal to feeling which makes me recall the incident. The sight was touching in its simplicity—for it was summer and the sun was shining. But civilization would take a different point of view; for in order to satisfy its ardent passion to perpetuate itself, a few paltry alphas and betas pieced together by uninspiring signs of addition and multiplication must live on long after the figure at the fountain in Christ Church has faded away. The ways of man are unjust in their working and the meaning of civilization has always been for a barbarian difficult to find. It has varied so much at different periods of history. Its complexity and changeability have made any one particular test inadequate. So that, what in the classical age was spoken of as the glory of Greece and the grandeur of Rome are to the man on the Clapham bus all a lot of 'hooey' and as dead as mutton.

Cast your eye to-day on the grand palace of Versailles. It once embodied the whole civilization of France, before the revolution had stripped

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the last Louis of his silken tights. I remember sitting with a friend in a gigantic café on the Avenue des Champs-Elysées, and watching the stream of traffic roll incessantly by from side to side. This colossal structure was the last word in *bistros*, and judging from the way in which it was packed, it was obvious that the French people, as a race, are almost addicted to them. I asked my friend then what he would do if, by a *coup d'état* a bloodless revolution restored the monarchy, and a Louis XIX with the Dauphin on his right drove down in a state towards the Place de la Concorde to view the gardens of the Tuileries. Would he as a Frenchman rejoice at the prospect of the revival of the civilization of a hundred years ago? His only answer was: "O! je m'en fiche . . . it is like in de cinema . . . no?" For there is no question of doubt that to those of his generation the revival of that period of civilization merely meant the return of the powdered wig, the elongated walking-stick, and the silk-laced cravat; and all that is left of *la majestée splendide* of the old civilization is the tragic story of a queen called Marie Antoinette, and a lot of furniture, which an English firm specializes in selling. No doubt

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Versailles still stands, and contemporary French civilization is conscious of its existence—not as the palatial home of the Bourbons, but as a convenient picnic spot for Americans and other tourists.

And in a similar manner many forms of Western civilization, of which I had read so much, have been ridiculed in turn by the generation which has now a civilization of its own. Those glorified descriptions of the greatness and beauty of the past are now only read by scenario writers to enable them to visualize the 'setting' of a romantic comedy. And it is not fatuous to forecast that that will be the fate of the civilization of this generation of Englishmen. Yet what will be pooh-poohed by their great-grandchildren will only be the fashion of the times, the follies and foibles whose superfluity does not affect the life of men. There will be no record of the effect of this civilization on those on whom it has been inflicted and who have had no alternative but to acquiesce. There is no record in history of what the slave felt when sold as a chattel in the Forum, nor will there be of the negro whom an infuriated and uncontrollable mob have lynched for the alleged seduction or rape of a white woman. The law of the predomi-

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nant civilization is the law of God on the same principle as might is right. Yet these men—the slave in the great Roman Empire and the negro in the neo-white civilization—would have a different tale to tell. And what I am venturing to do now, is to tell how, as a barbarian, I reacted to various forms of civilization—the civilization of the Englishmen of to-day—as they presented themselves to me. What I saw or felt, other barbarians may or may not have seen or felt. I cannot claim to speak for others when the reactions are entirely my own.

For years the peoples of India have acquiesced in the dumping of Western ideas on their country, which has been steeped in the culture of an ancient civilization and which has reverberated the finest thought that ever struck the mind of man. They have been tried by standards of a civilization entirely foreign to them, and to which they have no attachment of race or blood or religion. When they have complied, without any protest, they have been called 'apes'; when they have resisted they have been classified as uncouth barbarians. Well does Chesterton say in his essay *On Europe and Asia*: "We have not succeeded in making

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the remote Asiatic feel like a Christian; but we have succeeded in making him look like a cad. This seems to me to be one of the strangest and most sinister of all historical contradictions, when we consider what Christendom has to give and what it has given." But whereas this dumping of Western civilization *is* detrimental to those on whom it is inflicted, Christendom has not, as Chesterton believes, all that much to give which it has not yet given. Even when it is least offensive it is only a conglomeration of things that do not matter. This phase of it I encountered during my first week in London when I entered a mammoth store. It was pointed out to me as the complete triumph of man over the world—the peak of civilization. I stepped into the lift, which an immaculately dressed girl in green-braided uniform announced was going up.

"Going up ! Going up ! First floor—beds surgical appliances, gloves..." The doors open. A few alterations are made in the passengers. The doors close. "Going up ! Second floor—gowns, caps, men's underwear, innovations..." The doors open and shut again. "Going up ! Groceries, lingerie, hardware. . ." Up again !

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“Gramophones, loudspeakers . . .”—and something that sounded like members of Parliament. The recitation comes to an end on the top floor with “Refrigerators, cold storage, furs . . .” I do not vouch for the correctness of the various departments on the respective floors. Perhaps the refrigerators were with bad bargains in the basement, but the impression left on me was that I was going up, going up—up to the heights of civilization, until, having reached the climax, the doors shut again and I sank down gradually into the bowels of the earth. This was civilization as it presented itself in its least offensive form. But there are times when it is capable of sinking into the most ignoble depths to which man has in the chequered history of the world been degraded. Therefore, from the moment the gangway was lifted and the barbarian had left the shores of Barbaria, on his quest of the refinement of the West, till the time it shall join him again, and even afterwards, he has reason to believe that from what he has seen of England and its civilization, there is neither right nor justification for some of these men to trample with impunity on any part of the earth which they do not regard as civilized.

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Critics need not trouble to say that this or that particular benefit conferred on my barbaric civilization by the peoples of the West has been overlooked. Nor need the lady on the board of examiners repeat the impertinent question she once asked me in a *viva voce*: "Have you ever seen the inside of an English home?" There are, no doubt, many redeeming features of this civilization to be seen in the normal life of the English people, both at home and abroad, with which I am, and am not, familiar, but which there is no intention to include in these pages. That side of the picture has been presented to the world more than once. My purpose is not to attempt to renovate a renegade colonel, who will, on reading this, jump out of his bath-chair on his way to the local hydro and shout 'Rule Britannia' with all the patriotism of his second childhood. Nor would I like to see some retired magistrate of Poona, in his dotage, kneel down in his club in St. Jame's Square, and say: "There is more joy in Heaven and in my English heart at this one barbarian who repenteth and shows his gratitude than over ninety-nine civilized people. Amen!" No—gratitude is too civilized a refinement for a barbarian's indul-

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gence. It is intended to disillusion those barbarians who have spent years reading so much about glorious, gracious England, and who have spent the rest of their lives smarting under some of the prejudices of which that same civilization is capable. Englishmen of the more refined type, whose outlook on life is as cultured as it is human, will pardon me if I omit to eulogize that part of civilization which they represent. They know, that in spite of everything, they still will command from us the same great respect as they themselves in their turn have voluntarily paid to us as their fellowmen. But if it brings home to some of those offensive and insulting 'pukka sahibs' who have basked in the warmth of the Eastern sun and have felt that their civilization or their birth breeding is superior to that of the peoples of the East, on whom they have lived, fed, and fattened, and whom they now look down upon—if to these, thoroughbreds or Eurasians, it brings home in the slightest that they and their people are not quite so beautiful as they have often painted themselves, then will a small part of a longstanding debt of my people to them be discharged. It was their civilization that dared to christen us 'barbarians.'

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On the momentous occasion on which an expedition to Everest hoisted the flag on the wrong peak, a patriotic lady is reported to have said: "It will show the Indians what stuff we are made of." The noble lady will therefore forgive a barbarian for venturing to dilate on a few details of her civilization (the stuff they are made of !), which would not normally be found in instructive journals such as the *Saturday Review*.

\* \* \* \*

The barbarian, unlike civilized people, is considered born, not at the moment of his emergence from his mother's womb, but when civilization crosses his path.

II  
GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE



## II

### GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE

This phenomenon of birth brings the barbarian among God's chosen people. These divide themselves roughly into two classes—the one is 'bourgeois mediocrity' and considers itself the backbone of the nation, the other is society and enjoys the privilege of spelling its name with a capital letter. The working-class, although called a class, does not count at all, because Society has ruled it out. The ground for disqualification, as laid down in the unwritten code of civilization, is that as most of these people are usually unemployed, the '*working*'-class is a negligible element. This ruling is final, because in civilization the final court of appeal is the House of Lords, and as all these are 'Society' people, there is really no use appealing.

Now, bourgeois mediocrity is not only the backbone of the English nation, it is the hallmark of respectability. Although it is to be found in

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all parts of the world from Streatham to Pretoria, its London address is W. 2. Built in rows and rows of houses one like the other, covered in soot from the stacks of neighbouring chimneys, this district of London houses the pick of the middle classes. It is like a superior slum, except in its exaggerated emphasis on convention. It is totally devoid of individuality. The numbers on the houses are their only distinguishing marks.

Their inhabitants are the last of the post-Victorians. Their over-emphasis on respectability leaves little room for anything else. Sebaceous, uninteresting, inquisitive people, they are frantically keen on minding other people's business. But they are very amenable to discipline, and exhibit almost a slavish mentality, with a reverence for order and an abhorrence for drastic changes. They like their lives to be planned for them, and once planned, they show great reluctance to acclimatize themselves to new conditions. They believe implicitly in the shibboleths of Conservatism, because they are told that the best people do. They supply the proof to most of the proverbs.

Their minds are clerical in their working. They lack both imagination and individuality,

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and consider the presence of these in others as 'queer.' Their patriotism is not the outcome of a deeply-felt emotion, but is based on their theory of respectability. Although they do not exhibit vice in any appreciable form, their conception of virtue is limited. On the whole, they are a well-meaning people; so harmless that they are almost 'dumb.' They only break the even tenor of their lives by an occasional visit to Bournemouth or Brighton. They prove beyond any question of doubt that little things please little minds.

Outside one of these houses a dirty piece of cardboard hangs. It reads: 'Bed and Breakfast or Full Board.' Summoning up all his courage, the barbarian decides to enter this home of bourgeois mediocrity. He rings the bell.

A horrid wench answers the door. She is the maid. For a moment or two she looks at him as at some pre-historic specimen that has suddenly come to life again. Perhaps she will giggle and 'go all funny' as she inquires what he wants. "Rooms?—I'll ask modom." Before the barbarian can utter another word, she is already on her way to fetch 'modom.' As seen from the back, her walk is gawky. The heels of her shoes are

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worn down to the Garbo level. The barbarian finds that the atmosphere around him is contaminated with the stench of her body, yet he waits patiently at the doorstep for the appearance in person of 'modom.' A newspaper boy is yelling out the evening paper. The poster reads: 'BISHOP ON STERILIZATION.' His mind goes back to the face that opened the door. A cold shudder runs down the back of his spine as he contemplates the progeny of this woman and the generations of unwanted children she will give birth to. There can be nothing but vulgarity in the man who helps her to bear a child, which will only be cast on the scrapheap of his own civilization, for her body was like a lump of steak that has remained overnight in the larder. The very thought of it was lurid. And yet the barbarian could make no retort to her chuckle and her contemptuous giggle, which was the one spontaneous reaction of her civilization at its sudden encounter with that which was not part of it.

The lady of the house arrives. What I saw can be best described as 'adipose' collected in tranquillity.' She might be the owner, in which case proprietress is the appropriate mode of ad-

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dress; on the other hand, should she happen to be a mere caretaker or a manageress, the weekly bill is headed: 'Under the personal supervision of... Her very first appearance is stately and dignified. With her ample bosoms and a prosperous chest she has the making of a successful business woman. Her adherence to respectability is the keynote of her success. And she is so scrupulous in her propriety that, in spite of age curving her line, she allows herself but a sneaking glance at a Roussel advertisement. She hates being classified as a 'Mädchen in harness.' Her struggle with civilization therefore largely takes the form of a gentle tugging at some inner garment to relieve discomfort round the solar plexus. Of course, in politics she is Conservative. After all, her position demands that she should be at all times a very respectable woman. She is quick at summing people. Her opinion of persons varies with the promptness with which they pay their bills.

Her 'Residential Hotel,' which is only a more elaborate boarding-house, was once the town mansion of no less a person than the late Duke of ... So history and the landlady tells us. Mr has changed since the demise, some two hu

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years ago, of the late Duke. What a thrill it gave the barbarian, as he soaped himself next morning in his bath, to ponder over the fact that right there, only a few hundred years ago, once lived in flesh and blood the great nobility of England. Marble-coloured wall-paper in their bathrooms is the least tribute that this generation of hotel-keepers can pay to their ducal ancestry of leaseholders. For the bath is the one essential fact around which the cleanliness of respectable people centres. Usually a little tablet with a nursery rhyme or a doggerel hangs on the door to bring the point home to those who flock thither on their morning pilgrimage.

The main drawing-room is faintly reminiscent of the general war of a provincial lying-in hospital. The inmates call themselves a bevy of girls, but 'mothers-in-waiting' would be much more appropriate. These women vegetate chiefly on gossip. They are easily impressed, and show a marked feeling for the superficial. Their chief outdoor recreation is queueing up for public performances days ahead of the actual performance, and waiting outside theatres to see a handful of second-rate celebrities have after a first night. Of these

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plump and fecund women it might well be said that 'metamorphosis' is, as defined in the words of the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, "a change of form by magic or natural development." Epstein's 'Genesis' must have been conceived somewhere here.

This living-room is as ghastly as it is objectionable. It is either cheap and loud, or drab and depressing. The furniture is old but of no period. Stodgy in appearance, it has the tendency to have knobs on. There is no appropriate reason for anything except that it just happens to be there. In that is to be found its symmetry.

No spot on earth is more devoid of beauty than the home of bourgeois mediocrity. It would kill any spark of enterprise that a man may have spent a lifetime to acquire. The greatest genius could wake up any morning in W. 2 to find that ~~even~~ he was at the end of his tether. For genius, like everything else which is slightly beyond the comprehension of W. 2, falls under the classification of 'queer,' and its efflorescence, gushing forth in the midst of a civilization of shopkeepers, would only be regarded by conventional prudes as dangerous to the life-blood of the nation. They

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can see nothing in the Zolaism of Epstein and Lawrence except its gross immorality in the portrayal of the grotesque; the soul-force behind their realism... well—never mind.

And in this great bourgeois mediocrity which stretches from Streatham to Pretoria lies the gathered wisdom of civilization. No wonder, then, that God and nature entrusted them with the responsibility of protecting the less civilized. Wherever their ensign has been planted, they have reaped the fruits of their civilizations. They have brought peace where barbarian tribes had previously indulged in mediæval warfare; they brought Christianity to heathens; they planted coffee beans in wide open spaces; they brought law and order where there was chaos. What more could they have done in the few centuries of their sway ? But they made one fatal mistake. They judged all men by their own standard. Of them Protagoras might well have said: "The Englishman believes he is the measure of all things,—of those which exist and of those which have no existence."

And so the barbarian rambles on from respectability to gentility, finding himself somewhere in Mayfair, in the district immortalized by

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a green hat. There right in front of his eyes stands the ancestral home of the Double-Barrel Smiths. An ancestral holding is as essential to Society as respectability is to bourgeois mediocrity. It doesn't matter if this is a large estate or a small 'bed-sitter,' for an Englishman's home is his castle, and it is the principle of the thing that matters. Therefore behold, uncouth barbarian, the great splendour of a castle, without its moat and drawbridge! Its coat-of-arms is on the pub next door, drawing to it visitors even from across the Hellespont. Acres and acres of Shepherd's Market surround it. The Lord of the Manor awakes at the crack of dawn as the bugle announces the Morning Post. He settles down to his breakfast. He is fond of coffee and cereal—but especially of his wild oats.

John Double-Barrel Smith, scion of an ancient and noble family, has a personality all his own. It is the one thing that he owes nobody. Though a thoroughbred Englishman, he has acquired the appearance of a Great Dane. Of his breeding there is no question of doubt. It is chiefly to be seen in his insistence on tipping the bus conductor. His recreations vary from dirty lim-

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ericks to second-hand cars. He swears by *Debrett*, and in his leisure moments reads *Who's Who*.

The geographical extent of Mayfair varies with the interpolations in one's address. Thus, Oxford Street can easily be off Park Lane, as Mount Street is off Berkeley Square, and almost every other street within a radius of five miles of the West End is brought, if possible, into the magic circle of Mayfair. There is always something exclusive about it. A highly respectable superior-looking manager of a flat in Jermyn street once told me in perfect seriousness that I could have breakfast and almost anything else in bed. That was Society's idea of a modern self-contained service flat.

When circumstances and credit permit, John Double-Barrel Smith requests the pleasure of the company of his circle of friends, admirers and hangers-on to a Bacchanalia. Civilized people speak of cocktails. This, however, is a misnomer, as cheap sherry is usually served. The party is in the Greek Room. The family valet-butler-chauffeur is working up to his middle name. He sees that everything is done as best befits an English squire. The arrivals are solemnly announced. One of

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the first is Lady..., who has just returned from Paris after a somewhat serious appendicitis operation. Trouble started as usual on a Mediterranean cruise. Then the prepossessing charm of la Comtesse de ... immediately draws a circle of decorative men around her. In her case streamline is defined as the state of the body after it has passed the stage of child-bearing. Her interest in young men is therefore purely platonic, but as her general knowledge is so extensive, she is able to cover a lot of ground. A little later the Baroness Whatawitch Gatecrasher arrives with her poodle, Poof. The æsthetic element is brought in by Mr. Narcissus of Burton-on-Trent, wearing a lovely pink carnation in the buttonhole of his new suit from Burton-on-tick. He is an exquisite boy! Mr. Jonah Jonah, a wealthy young partner of the firm of Goldberg's, is there for no reason at all. He is attentively listening to Colonel..., who is brimful of stories of life in the Cannibal Islands and Barbaria. What looks like a scratch on a dilapidated pimple, is in reality the scar left by a deep wound from the knife of a Zulu chief, whom the Colonel, far back in the naughty nineties, accused of cheating at solitaire, and his cuff-

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links, which appear to be a pair from Woolworth's, are made out of the frontal sinus of a rebel in darkest Africa.

Suddenly there is an awe-inspiring silence. The great attraction of the evening has arrived. With her mink coat, and her lips and fingernails ablaze with red, unannounced, she makes a dramatic entry. All eyes are turned towards her. Mouths gape. But she soon relieves the tension with: "How's it going, folks ?" It then falls to the lot of the little barbarian, whose presence and entry in the room had till then remained unnoticed, to make the *faux pas* of the evening. Turning to his nearest neighbour, he inquires who the latest arrival is. In a voice that is carried to the farthest corners of the room, the answer comes: "Really, you don't mean to say you don't know Cutie ? Dear boy ! But how excruciatingly funny ! She was in the Follies, of course !" For the rest of the evening the barbarian feels like 'the dandelion that ventured to reveal itself on the centre court on the final day of Wimbledon.'

The young woman, in a crepe-de-China dress with chrysanthemums and aspidistra printed all over it, then stretches herself on the settee and

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surveys the room. One knee is flung on top of the other, her skirt drawn over with the appropriate touch of modesty to conceal those shapely legs of which she is so proud. For although Cutie is a social asset and a household word in Society, she is, as she once said, "Sort-of-kind-of-kittenish." It is the peak of one's ambition to be introduced to her at a party. And if, by any stroke of luck, she happens to recognize you again at another function a week or so later, your future is assured. She has been very successfully married, though sufficiently modern not to move about with her husband except when being photographed for a young-married Series. And yet she retains the old-fashioned touch of speaking of her husband—especially in her weaker moments. Fond of sport and travel, she is always on the move from hunt to hunt and party to party all over the country. In fact, she has to sleep in a different bed nearly every day. It is amazing how she manages to go round.

It is nearing dusk, and the revelry is quickly drawing to a close. A few guests decide to adjourn to the pub next door. The attachment of the Double-Barrel Smiths to this public-house

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is now an item of national history. No children's book is complete without a reference to the details of their association. The very glass in which the first Double-Barrel Smith drank his pennyworth of ale is preserved in the Treasure Room on the first floor. One has to spend a penny to see it. Outside the pub hangs the coat-of-arms. The great dragon Agamous lies *couchant*.

And that is Mayfair—the holy of holies!—the Mecca of the West End, the shrine at which so many pay homage. There is no doubt that there is a great deal to be said for this *quartier chic* of London, but the whole conception of Mayfair is so distorted by those who have stepped from obscurity into the momentary notoriety of a credit bank balance, and whose breeding and culture would not allow them to react otherwise than they do, that Mayfair has become the Stygian mire into which is incessantly poured the acquired perversions of the ages. But it is not Mayfair itself that is perverted; it is the reaction of those whose spiritualization of the body has resulted in a degradation of the soul, that is so perverse in its superficiality. So also effeminacy in men, of which one sees so much in the neighbourhood

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of Shepherd's Market, is not immoral because society—with the small 's'—has decreed it to be so, but it is unbeautiful because those whom Nature has gifted with a form to suit their manhood, deliberately attempt to distort that form to acquire a behaviour which is wholly unworthy of their sex. It shows a lack of understanding and of appreciation of beauty.

Looked at from the barbarian's point of view, what makes Mayfair so detestable is the false sense of values which becomes so blatantly apparent. What is pointed out to him as Society with a capital 'S' and the code of manners and behaviour of the Upper Ten, is nothing but the vile *ne plus ultra* of superficiality. For Mayfair—the word being used strictly figuratively—has neither depth nor vision; there is no lasting or substantial pleasure which would compensate those who drink deep of its waters; nor has it for the habitue the fatal fascination which opium has for the drug-fiend. It is rather a stagnant pool, for the sole purpose of breeding infectious bacteria. Like a corpulent body that is rotting with decay, it has the tendency to disgorge its noxious odour. And what passes the understanding of the barbarian

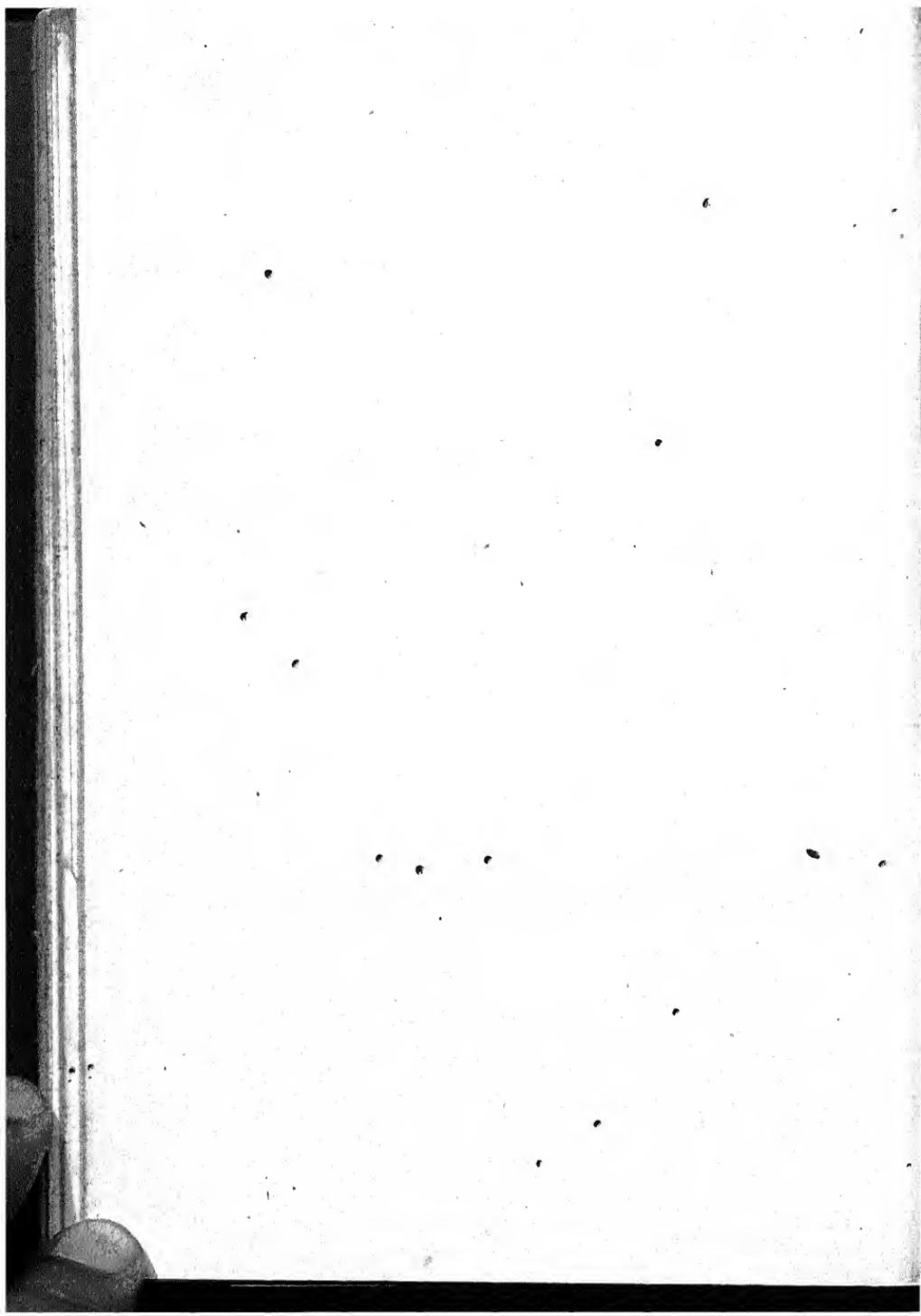
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is that all this ugly, sordid, unhealthy, superficial, stagnant existence should not only be allowed to exist by this civilization, but that it should be glorified as the privileged life of God's chosen people. It is the demi-god of the *demi-monde*.

20/12/88

III

THEIR SOPHISTICATED SYMPHONY



### III

## THEIR SOPHISTICATED SYMPHONY

Outside new Babylon's massive doors, inlaid with chromium, stands a portly commissionaire, his chest emblazoned with highly polished medals, souvenirs of the last war, and ribbons to remind him of the great part he played in it. Now he contents himself with opening doors of taxicabs and limousines as they roll up in quick succession to the front door of the New Babylon. He is a keen collector of coins, specializing chiefly in sixpences. This was so profitable a business that not so long ago he paid to be employed. Now he is only allowed to recompense his employers by hiring his gorgeous uniform. Blue or brown, it has innumerable little knobs on, running parallel along the curves which prosperity, middle-age, and beer-drinking have effected on his imposing figure.

It is supper-time, and the theatres have just

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closed. Entertaining out has become very common among the *bon-viveurs* of London; much more so than it is in Paris or on the Continent. So they flock in, night after night, to swell the coffers of the New Babylon. Women extravagantly garbed in yards of silk or velvet, with a chinchilla coat worth some thousands of pounds hanging carelessly over their bare shoulders to keep them warm. Jewellery of fabulous price is often worn, though sometimes for the sake of safety, replicas are found more convenient, for it can hardly be comfortable to feel that a five-thousand-pound pearl might fall any moment into the *minestrone* and get swallowed up by the owner for a piece of spring onion which is put in to flavour the juice. The men are uniformly but immaculately clad in evening dress. The best firms in Saville Row exhibit their capabilities unostentatiously on the sleek figures of the smart young men about town. One can never tell how much of the squareness of their shoulders is genuine and how much is the result of clever padding.

The arrangement of tables, the sorting out of the best from the second best, artificiality from gentility, plebs from nobility, creditors from deb-

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tors, is the task of the *maitre d' hôte!*, who is the genius in whose hands the making or unmaking of a restaurant lies. He is usually Italian or French; suave and gentle, he is the personification of amiability. Always rubbing his hands, bowing profusely to the guests as they come in, he is successful in making each party believe that they alone will have his special attention and that the best table on the floor has, in anticipation, been reserved for them. He loathes the man who is not impressed, though always gentleman enough to respect him. The idiosyncrasies and eccentricities of individuals are with him a studied art. There are some who will only sit with their backs to the wall; others insist on a floor table. If he can please both, why not? A crotchety dowager, who thinks nothing of a 50 per cent., tip, is worth putting up with, even if she insists on having red wine when white is correct, and calling the best Russian caviare buck-shot. But she must be personally attended to each day, although eventually she decides to have the 'same.' The *maitre d'hôtel* spends his spare moments coming up to his special clients and inquiring after their health. He often says: "I have ze special surprise for Monsieur."

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Sometimes this takes the form of crossed anchovies and an inverted olive perched on top of the same veal cutlet. But he must know what to say, and when; his memory must be as tactful as it is convenient. He must have good eyes to see, good ears with which to hear, but a mouth that only opens on the appropriate occasions, and then it must produce the desired effect. His work and the responsibility it involves necessitate his being well paid. He is therefore a man of some means, who on retirement usually goes to hibernate in the South of France.

Waiters and *commis* flit around like busy bees. There are at least a couple of hundred on the staff, what with those innumerable hands that work behind the scenes, of whose existence the normal restaurant-goer is hardly aware. A *commis* is usually distinguished from the full blown waiter by the white apron he wears round him. Behind closed doors is the real key to the situation for, after all, to the gourmet who frequents restaurants, it is the food that matters. Carefully prepared dishes, delicately but elaborately garnished, are the result of years of training and of hours of detailed labour. The head chef is responsible

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for everything that leaves the kitchen. When necessary, he knows how to add a few finishing touches which change not only the outward appearance but also the whole tone of the dish, which from being merely wholesome now becomes just perfect. Sometimes he has to put up with a complaint about a dish of the most delicious chicken, because of an unappreciative customer who insists on having it done his own way. Spotlessly dressed in white, with his hat leaning on one side like the Tower of Pisa, and his moustache beautifully gummed and pointed, he surveys the area over which he is a veritable monarch, now and again encouraging a young assistant by a monosyllabic 'gut,' or reprimanding him because he did not trouble to measure the appropriate quantity of salt or spice in the making of a sauce.

Meanwhile, on the floor of the ballroom, beautiful women are gracefully gliding with young swains to the long-drawn strains of a sentimental waltz or shaking their hips to syncopate with the staccato rhythm of 'hot' jazz. The orchestra is usually one of the most expensive items in the restaurant business. It is difficult to estimate how

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much a week it costs and how much of this goes to the *chef d'orchestre* and how much to the individuals in it. Yet, when one hears of the comfortable lives they lead, producing music for a living cannot be too bad. Well-known dance-band leaders are usually to be seen moving about in 'the best of circles.' Their private lives, their successes and failures at gambling parties, are front-page news. To a man who doesn't know, it would appear absurd that all this money should be expended on one who merely knows how to wield a little baton successfully.

And as the barbarian steps into this New Babylon of the twentieth century, to see how civilization kicks the gong around, sprightly little page-boys, drilled and disciplined, in picturesque uniform, are all attention, taking the barbarian's hat and coat and orders carefully, and punctuating all their remarks with a smart 'yes, sir.' Having completed these and other minor preliminaries, he enters the great hall of sophistication, unaware that there are more self-imposed restrictions in the so-called land of freedom than are necessary to regulate the conduct of grown-up people. Pleasure, when it has to keep an eye on time, loses

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half its joy.

Is it a pleasant thing that you cannot order a drink after eleven unless you stuff yourself with food, or alternatively watch it being wasted on your table in compliance with the regulations of the law; is it pleasant that it then gets snatched away from you at midnight when you are only half-way through the *entrée*? The gourmet likes to sit over his food and to sip his wine. He hates the idea of a waiter standing by, urging him to chase it down, like a mother giving a dose of castor-oil to a seven-year-old schoolboy. Then, soon after midnight, except on the rare occasions of extension nights, whether the place is packed or not, everybody seems to want everybody else to leave, and all round one sees tables being dismantled and chairs being packed away. It is more than a broad hint that it is time to pack up, for all decent people should be in bed by then.

There is something about this sophistication which is crudely artificial; there is a restraint which shows a marked sign of repression; the whole atmosphere of the place is uncomfortable, and to breathe freely in it is almost an impossi-

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bility; and what seems incredible to the barbarian is that grown-up people, who have long attained the age of responsibility and reason, should be put to the humiliation of this midnight round-up of respectability. The people of the Continent, equally civilized, though less conscious of it, provide for those who want it recreation and amusement till the early hours of the morning. There are no restrictions of drink or hours, and respectability is one's own business. What night life is there in London which is not crude and nauseating ? The perpetual fear of a police raid, the exorbitant prices to compensate those who indulge in the risk of fines and imprisonment, make a visit to a London night-club unpleasant and more than expensive. The offspring of Bacchus out of Dora could not be otherwise.

To the barbarian who knows his Paris well, there is nothing in London to compare with the Rue Fontaine, littered as it is with its *boîtes de nuit* standing in double file on both sides of the road. That little stretch of Paris from the Place Blanche to the Rue Pigale has an atmosphere all its own. Each little place, with its

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minute dance floor, of which 'standing room only' would be an appropriate description, is packed out night after night—*Cabine Cubane*, the old *Fetiche*, *Habanera*, or whatever may now be in their place. There was Olée Cooper, the crowning genius of Melody's Bar, with Louis as the *maître d'hôtel*, and the same middle-aged prosperous looking French woman at the cash desk. Olée Cooper—*le premier chanteur américain*—as Louis was accustomed to announce him—with his quiet unassuming personality, his beaming smile, greeting an old friend or admirer in a voice which has a softness and a depth all its own: "Boy, I sho' am glad to see ya"; his hands clasped together, with a bright spot fixed on his ebony black complexion, relieved only by the whiteness of his spotlessly clean evening shirt, then gave an effortless rendering of 'The Boulevard of Broken Dreams' Pearly teeth with a gold filling and just that one word 'shine'. The orchestra, complete with a couple of marachas and ebony sticks, beats time to some distant hula melody, whose suggestiveness only Paris has ever caught. Shrill notes of a clarinet

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make seductive syncopation for thick lips and dilated nostrils. Great Melody's Bar ! Standing in a class by itself, brimful of people in summer, winter, or spring, day in, day out, from Monday to Sunday and back again, never changing its name, untouched by all the depression that caused havoc in the night life of Paris, this *boîte* of Paris, chic as hell, is worth going a long way to see.

Or Frisco, then Montmartre's king of laughter, the idol of Paris, a perfect entertainer, great stylist, on whose forehead wealthy admirers pasted fifty-and hundred-franc notes which beads of perspiration helped to keep stuck on. Grandees flocked to him; decorative women gracefully glided on the floor of the Chez Florence to the strains of a sentimental tango. Everything looked a million dollars, and was. A prince charming thought nothing of buying a whole instrument of one of the orchestra to satisfy the whims of a lady in his party.

No evening in Montmartre was complete without a final snack at the *Cloche d'Or* with its bar strewn with the coquettes with their hats cocked on one side, and just that cutest 'goshdarn' look

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in their great big gorgeous eyes. Those 'dog-gone' days! Yet nothing looked immoral, and nothing was, for that spirit of Montmartre is interpreted to the French by a coloured people who "understand the whole art of living—fully, deeply, and efficiently." The coloured artist in Montmartre is an artist in the fullest sense of the word, passionately attached to whatever form of music he may be efficient at, deriving a pleasure and a satisfaction from the singing of a song, or the beating of a drum, as great, or greater, than that derived by those hundreds of pleasure seekers who flock to hear him on their nightly pilgrimage.

There may be a little unknown den in London, somewhere in the back streets of the West End, which may be called 'Harlemania.' It is one of the few places where the coloured man can feel really at home. It has the look of a tough joint, though for those to whom the outside world has been unkind, this is the milk of human kindness. There is no elaborate decoration, and no portly commissionaire with his medals and ribbons to guard the entrance. Only a long line of taxicabs wait patiently outside in the hope of taking

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a few fares back. The interior is a queer mixture of the Boulevard Clichy and Boulevard St. Michel, of Harlem and China—and a few Englishmen and women who just don't fit in at all. The decoration is reminiscent of remnants from Paris *boîtes*, which can be fixed and taken off with great ease and at as little expense. Clouds of smoke pervade the air. The atmosphere is not fresh. There is a feeling of perpetual tension—a scrap which looks like taking place at any moment never does. Any little argument just 'pipes down.' The orchestra and the cabaret are often improvised from the clientele itself. There is a consensus of opinion that everybody who obliges with a song or a dance is to be encouraged with applause. Sometimes a good performance is in store for those who are expecting nothing, but often the expected happens—nothing.

With this possible exception, there is nothing in London to compare with the night life of Paris. The Englishman has a very peculiar conception of 'kicking the going around'; and when night-clubs are regarded as a wholly immoral business it just helps to put the lid on. The Englishmen who go along to these rendezvous of London,

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go because they think that the women who go there alone will guess why the men have come. It is not so much a question of guessing. It is blatantly apparent. At a distant corner table a corpulent man is gorging himself on what 'booze' money can buy after hours. From his table he casts his lustful eyes around. He blushes at his own thoughts, and get embarrassed and self-conscious when he thinks someone is looking at him. Then he gets all shy and coy. An obliging gigolo, dressed like a stuffed dummy with shoulders like epaulettes, displays the sex-appeal of his dancing partner. A beaming smile from the stranger has sealed the bargain. For the rest of the evening—or rather morning, as it is already after midnight—he will be amused by a sophisticated lady. This *demi-mondaine* is one of the emanations of society, as a result of the change in outlook and ideals in civilization after the war. The woman with the long skirt and the ample bodice is long since dead. Her place is taken by the dazzling peroxide blonde, who is covered only in a few flimsy garments, hung together on little pink or blue straps to keep within the bounds of English morality. Little sophis-

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ticated lady ! What a multitude of men you endeavour to amuse with your conversation which is so naive and yet so blasé. With what little you have you try to make your little world, speaking now of the dinner at the New Babylon, which you really never had, and the bottle of champagne, which was of no vintage, and the jewellery which was at best a good imitation. Yet over it all you throw your cloak of sophistication, and a million little untruths are wrapped up in it. The thicker the mantle, the less one can see through your bundle of harmless lies. You are just the finishing touch to the great sophisticated symphony, which civilization is always trying to play.

And so the night-clubs of London are run; and the men return from them with faint recollections of bacon and eggs, a curly-headed blonde, a bottle of sour wine, and the handful of pounds which the whole evening cost. Most of the time they have had to keep an eye on the bottle for fear of its being pinched or emptied or reduced to half by a thirsty waiter or a gigolo at a neighbouring table, whose throat had gone dry. The management and the orchestra expect a drink out of it every time they honour you with a smile or

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a request number. And on top of all this, if by any chance you happen to underrate the cloak-room attendant, the unfortunate client is made conscious of a strong desire on the part of the attendant to chuck the customer out of the premises, and the hat and coat and stick will follow suit.

The last notes of the symphony are over, and tired and exhausted by this over-estimated night life of London, the barbarian turns homewards, taking in some fresh air by a gentle stroll before retiring to his 'civilized' bed. There is a weird reflection of street-lamps on the shiny surface of the road. The evening has been damp and sordid, but now in the early hours of the morning—or more precisely at four o'clock—the rain has stopped its incessant pour. Nature reveals nothing in its darkness. Only shadows creep in the distance. There is still life, though not enough to disturb the quiet of the silent zone. A little wayside coffee-stall, which is a strange counterpart of the New Babylon, is the only form of life one can see, but around it are gathered a stranger assortment of people. Tired as he is, the barbarian cannot resist the temptation of stopping a few

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moments on the excuse of having a cup of coffee. Next to him is a cabman, who has stopped by for a stu'penny-worth of warmth in its shelter. These men, who work by night, have often to stimulate their nerves with a cup of tea. He unbuttons his great coat. Green, shiny, it shows signs of wear. His cap is tilted in an attitude of relaxation. The boiling tannin, with a dash of milk and sugar, acts both as a stimulant and an anæsthetic. He might have a bun. It is more appropriately called rock-cake. The smell of hotdogs grilling in the juice of onions acts as the flavouring spice of his evening meal. He is a cockney of the Ol' Bill type. A product of the last century, he prides himself as the bloke that won the war. The fatal tragedy at Sarajevo, the murdered Arch duke, the neutrality of Belgium are meaningless to him. He did not fight because statesmen attached their signature on his behalf to a treaty, of whose existence he was not even aware. His was the spontaneous gesture to rally to the call of 'King and Country.' He fought for a flat which for him stood for all that was 'best and brightest' in the history of civilization. It was not to make England a land fit for heroes to live in or to make

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the world safe for democracy, that he shouldered arms to risk all that life meant to him. He was above all that. He merely fought for the protection of those in whose midst he was born, bred, and nurtured, and those women and children whom he thought were in danger of extinction. Seventeen years after, he still has the look of a disillusioned man. What he tried to preserve, his own civilization has shamefully neglected, and even gradually devoured. There is a wistful longing in his eyes. Fixed on something that isn't there, the retina reflects a prehistoric bottle of Bovril or Oxo. As he lifts his cup and sips loudly from it, one can see that his hands are the worse for wear. On his short stumpy fingers are huge, square nails. The accumulation of dirt is the only visible mark of civilization. Dirt—just dirt—that's what it has all meant to him. Life could have no other meaning in like circumstances.

He does not easily enter into conversation. Futile talk is meaningless—just words, words, words, when there is neither the inclination nor the energy to be sociable. Occasionally he dries his moustache by a dexterous movement of his

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lower lip; it has turned grey with age, and cheap cigarettes have tinted it yellow. With his elbows he rests on the counter of the coffeestall, while a filthy rag clears away the crumbs of bread and cake that periodically collect on the chequered linoleum. The licence plate in one of the side partitions is a constant reminder to the host that every possible effort must be made to come up to the L.C.C.'s highly controversial standard of cleanliness.

Meanwhile the barbarian feels that his starched shirt and his silk hat, in which he has rigged himself in order to be suitably dressed for admission into the New Babylon, are now completely out of place. His very presence there has made everybody else uncomfortable. There is a lull in the conversation and two women give him 'the once over.' The host has a strange feeling of satisfaction at the presence of this unknown 'gentleman.' He feels that a few well-chosen words on the weather would be appropriate. If these fail to produce the necessary effect, he immediately takes refuge in a quotation from a second-rate celebrity—but nevertheless a celebrity—who made the same observation on a similar

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occasion. If the barbarian still remains unimpressed, the host addresses the same remark to everybody else, who nod their approval of this profound dictum. The host adds the finishing touch by nodding his own.

By now the cab-driver has finished his frugal repast. His face lights up when asked by the barbarian if his cab is free. It is a great honour to drive a 'gentleman' home, which of course is not so much a compliment to the barbarian as it is to his tailor. The occasion demands a new smoke, and from his humble packet of woodbines he manages to unearth an unsmoked cigarette. The rings of smoke as they emanate from his happy person perfume the early morning air.

Four-thirty ! The half-hour has just struck as the barbarian tucks himself in bed. To-morrow will be another awakening.



IV  
THEIR ATTITUDE TO SEX



## IV

### THEIR ATTITUDE TO SEX

No less an authority than the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines sex as 'being male or female or hermaphrodite.' In that definition is to be found the attitude of civilized society to the complex problem of sex. Ever since curiosity was first aroused as to how babies were born, the average Englishman has been brought up to regard sex as a state of 'being' rather than a state of 'feeling' —as a fact comparable to the state of one's digestion.

It is therefore not surprising that in the *Outline of Modern Knowledge*, the article on sex should be written by a professor of animal genetics. The learned professor says: "It follows therefore that .....the phenomena which are the most prominent features in the act of sexual congress, are reflex actions and are not under the control of the brain." This conclusion is based on observations from

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the most elaborate experiments on rats. Rats!—when there are hundreds of thousands of men and women who, every day of their existence, exhibit some form of sex in the normal conduct of their lives. What is true of rats is, we are told, true of men. For he says further: "If they [i.e. reflexes] exist in the case of man—and there is no reason to assume that they do not—then in all probability the sensory stimuli must be largely presented by the physical attractions of the heterosexual partner; these, in their turn, being qualified by all sorts of inhibitions and preferences born of social experience. However, the application of the concept of the reflex arc to the problems of sex behaviour has placed future research in this particular field on a firm basis. This has made it possible to exclude the influence of consciousness as an active factor in matters of sex, and to regard consciousness as a more or less additional phenomenon." So that the only qualifications to distinguish the sex behaviour of men and rats are "inhibitions and preferences born of social experience." Consciousness, which perhaps stands for will and personality, can almost be neglected as "a more or less additional

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phenomenon."

But sex is not—except in its most crude forms—a copulation of heterosexual bodies. It is rather a congress of personalities, between whom there is an unknown and indefinable common denominator. That is why sex, which in adolescence one is taught to regard as repulsive to one's sensibility, becomes in later life the touchstone of one's whole attitude to life in general. The stage is reached—no doubt after the first flush of puberty—when the man desires the personality of a woman much more than he wants her body. Parents seldom realize this, and in their effort to 'drive the devil away' by nipping in the bud sexual desire in a child, they invariably kill its personality—or call it soul—at the same time.

Sex is not a mere *causa causans* putting into operation a whole machinery of reflexes; it is the *causa sine qua non* of the meaning and purpose of creation. The attitude of mind—the consciousness—is therefore most essential in dealing with the psychological aspect. And there is all the difference in the world between copulation and sex, used in its wider sense, as there is between

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rats and men.

This may only be a barbarian's point of view. Born as he is 'in the open air of nature and in the face of the sun,' his impulse of sex is not poisoned and encrusted by the conventions of any civilized code. His morality is not based on dogmas; it is not a choice of good and evil, but 'an artistic balance of light and shade.' And he is not ashamed of it. In his eagerness to stress the existence of a soul, he is inclined to appear sloppy and sentimental. His orientalism has given him a conception of love which is more mature than that of the overgrown English schoolboy, who has just fallen for his seventh 'best' girl. For the barbarian there is no clear line of demarcation, which says: Here sex ends and love begins. Both are stages in the manifestation of a desire to reproduce. Looked at from the woman's point of view, it is the desire to preserve and recreate her ideal of man. In civilized England all this is sob stuff and "sex, my dear boy, is just an infernal nuisance." So, to the post-Victorian, marriage was only sinless comfort; the ultra-moderns marry because some Bloomsbury specialist recommends vitamin X for their nerves. That leaves Bateman with the man

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who read *Brave New World* and took Huxley seriously.

Those who find it economically impossible to conform to the rigid rules of convention, and are afraid to live otherwise, make a frantic effort to remain in celibacy. This desire to remain celibate is not unnatural, but regarding sex as unbeautiful is. Nature persists. Man retorts with self-control in the form of repression. The only trouble with repression is that when carried beyond the pale of normal endurance, it usually breaks out in spots.

The result is inevitable. Drawing down his hat over his ears and with his collar turned up for fear of recognition, the civilized man wends his way towards the West End, as evening casts her gloomy shadow over the streets of London. A feeling of guilt runs through him. His eyes are fixed steadfastly on the ground, as he walks with his hands in his overcoat pocket. He sees a pair of legs moving towards him. As he looks up, a gentle smile greets him. For a moment he hesitates, but the sight of a policeman across the road unnerves him. Unconsciously he accelerates his pace. Round the corner things are quieter.

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Under the doorway of a shop he discerns the figure of a woman. He looks around to see how the law lies. Now is his great moment. There is to be no finesse or subtlety in his great adventure. He hardly knows how to address her. His embarrassment at being called 'darling' only evokes a half-hearted 'hello' from himself. His one idea is to get it over.

Some thirty minutes later, out of some street door in the near vicinity, the face of a man is seen to peer out. It is the same face. The door opens gently and he emerges stealthily from it. In his anxiety to leave no trace behind, he is like a murderer creeping away from the scene of his crime. Quickly he jumps into the first available cab. He whispers an address. As he leans back in his seat, there is a deep sigh of relief from within him. It has all been such a confounded nuisance. Perhaps the professor of animal genetics was right in drawing his conclusions from rats.

Somewhere across the road a barbarian is looking on. His uncouth mind does not quite grasp the ratiocination of refined culture. To him there is pathos in the tragedy of the woman. Pity—that would be wasted on her. She is too

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hardened to do anything but laugh at such a gesture. But what the barbarian feels is better expressed by the French word '*sympathique*', which can best be defined as a feeling of understanding without the necessity of adopting the attitude which gives rise to a complex on either side.

Yet, more often than not, she is not a very desirable woman. She has lost so much faith in man that she would not trust her own kith and kin. It is very difficult to ascertain the trend of events which eventually culminated in her joining the grand parade. Perhaps she chose it of her own accord, stepping out of a humble home into the open world with nothing except her bundle of dreams. It may have been the glamour of footlights, or an exaggerated idea of easy wealth—ambition or adventure—who knows? These women in their youth begin in madness, but in the end there often comes disillusion and sadness.

Germaine was once a pretty little girl. She was dark and parted her hair in the centre. The pre-Raphaelites would have loved to paint her. Her sweet smiling face was once to be seen behind the counter of a drug-store in Regent Street. Forty-eight hours for thirty bob a week, and a

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'flick' on Sunday with her boy friend. It wasn't good enough, so she gambled with life, her mind made up to break the bank of Monte Carlo. But in a flash it was all over, for the dream has turned to a bitter reality, and another woman in England is for ever on the streets. Quite early in life she has turned haggard and pale. Her looks can hardly keep pace with the strain her life necessitates. Malnutrition and sometimes even complete lack of food compel her body to resort to self-absorption. Yet in spite of everything she is human, in that in her moments of despondency she seeks her own level. She does little acts of kindness when least expected. Spasmodically she is generous to those who are less fortunate than herself. Eventually cast off on the scrap-heap of humanity, she is carried away to wherever tide or fortune takes her. As far as civilization is concerned, she has just faded away.

Meanwhile, in his little laboratory, the professor of animal genetics is still experimenting on rats !

V

THEIR THIRST FOR SENSATION

1870-1871

## V

### THEIR THIRST FOR SENSATION

Vulgarity may be the spice of life, but pure filth is just dirt; and as a race the English are not at heart a very 'clean' people. This sweeping statement must be explained and qualified. Cleanliness in a whole people does not depend on the accumulation or lack of foreign matter dumped on the back of one's ears, just as vulgarity is not determined by the stock of jokes which fluctuate periodically with other stock in the Exchange. It is determined by the reactions of the English as a people to the more varied happenings of their everyday existence. It is to this perverted pleasure—this thirst for sensation—that their vulgarity and their love for dirt and filth are attributed.

"Sensation—6.30 ... SENSATION ... paper—6.30 sen-sa-tion"—or do ears deceive? Under the entrance of an Underground station a news-

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paper boy is making a frantic effort at 2.30 to sell off the 6.30 edition. The poster would even hit a blind man in the eye. Bold black letters read 'UP 70,000.' What does it mean? The padre of the parish church in the diocese of ... who has come up to London for the day, surveys it carefully. Adjusting his silver-rimmed eye-glasses, he assures himself again that the figure is 70,000. It could only be one of two things—the birth or the death-rate. Whichever it is, it will provide either food for thought or matter for his Sunday sermon. He adjusts his glasses again. He convinces himself that it is no idle curiosity but a righteous and inherent urge from within that instigates him to indulge in the necessary expenditure of a penny to keep himself acquainted with the trend of thought and events of the civilization to which he is continually a bearer of messages. The Socialist buys the paper for the satisfaction of assuring himself that unemployment figures, as a result of handling by this capitalist class, have gone up seventy thousand. Did he not that morning forecast a general election, and a sensational return of Socialism and dramatic come-back of himself? The keen aviator has visions of an-

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other air-record. This front-page news—sold at a penny a time—is in the form of an auditor's report—and the circulation of the paper has gone up seventy thousand. “Sensation—6.30. Sensation”—the voice from the tube station entrance is still crying, and the edition is quickly selling out.

In a little waiting-room, whose dimensions are strikingly diminutive in contrast with the sumptuousness of the gigantic building of the *Daily* . . . , a few harmless looking people are killing time until various editors are able to see them. Anxiously they look at the clock, whose marked and decisive beats can be heard in the quietness that pervades. Outside in the corridor the shuffling of feet arouses curiosity. The impatience soon reaches saturation point. Various secretaries pop in and out, conveying various forms of regrets and suggesting a postponement of the appointment. The expression on their faces suggests a front-page sensation. The barbarian packs up his thousand constructive words on the future of Barbaria, and picking up his hat and coat and stick, resigns himself to the dictates of the efficient-looking female secretary, for her voice was emphatic in its determination. It reverberated in

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every syllable the power of the Press. Disappointed, the barbarian descends in the lift. He leaves the doors of the *Daily* ... and steps off the kerb to cross the street. In the near distance is a poster, with just one word 'ASSASSINATION' written clearly and boldly across it. Round the corner the posters increase in number. In a flash he sees 'MURDER', 'MARSEILLES', 'SARAJEVO AGAIN', 'WAR?' The power of the Press! In a moment a sensation is flashed across the length and breadth of the world, while the thousand constructive words on the future of Barbaria are reposing in an inner breast pocket of a tailor-made suit, hidden from the eyes that are feasting on murder, Marseilles, and war.

There is in civilization a mania for horrid sensations. Think of the hundreds of people who pay every day to see the Chamber of Horrors at Tussaud's. To view with admiration the effigies in wax of distinguished men may be great and ennobling in the best English tradition, but when it comes to gloating over the images of criminals, whom a notorious trial has brought into undue prominence, it becomes nothing but a perversion, as inexplicable and less excusable than sadism. The tablets read: "This is the peram-

### *Their Thirst for Sensation*

bulator, in which Mrs. . . . wheeled her murdered child . . ."; "in this bath-tub . . ." These men and women have been hanged; the victims' are dead, and yet the perambulator and the bath-tub are preserved and viewed by queues of people with as much zealousness and curiosity as they are accustomed to regard national art treasures. It must be a sensation-thirsty people who can view with equanimity that which to a barbarian is still reeking with the blood of unfortunate individuals though, chemically, the blood-stains may have been removed; it must be a 'filthy' civilization that glories in such decadence.

In civilization nothing succeeds like sensation. Kensington, reputed to be quiet and respectable, has a Metropolitan station at the entrance of which an imposing receptacle invites contributions for disabled and distressed railwaymen and widows and orphans. It is not an ordinary collection box, but a replica of a 12-inch high-explosive shell, presented by Messrs. Vickers, Ltd.! A 12-inch high-explosive shell, to collect funds for widows and orphans. What could be more appropriate than reminding the people who pass there every day to and from their daily work of the

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eventful years of 1914-1918 ? Can there be any more enlivening sight for the eyes of the children of this generation ?

Meanwhile, turning over his morning paper, the barbarian stumbles on a paragraph headed: **DRIVEN TO SUICIDE BY WAR DREAD**. It reads: "A Mother's dread of war and her choice of suicide in preference to awaiting poison gas attacks was revealed in a note to the H ... coroner. Before gassing herself, this woman of sixty-three wrote: 'I am taking this way out in preference to waiting for the enemies' poison gas. I dread reading about it !' The Coroner recorded a verdict of suicide while of unsound mind."

'Of unsound mind !'—it is more than a coroner's verdict. It is the verdict of civilization itself on those who preferred to put an end to their lives rather than to live in the agony which that civilization brought to them. For either this particular woman must be considered to be of unsound mind, or the whole idea and purpose of civilization would contradict itself. Therefore, in the year of the Lord one thousand nine hundred and thirty-five, the coroner on behalf of civilization decreed that she *was* of unsound mind. And

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so it shall be! That is all.

A chloroformist gives laughing gas to deaden the pain by putting the patient in a state of unconsciousness before the operation. Poison gas does much the same; the difference is only one of degree. And so, when an armament firm has succeeded in finding a new formula for poison gas which kills faster than any other civilization gives it its blessings. This benediction is in the form of a patent. And the government of the day recommends that the head of the armament firm be elevated to the peerage, and the ingenious inventor be honoured with a knighthood—‘for services rendered to humanity.’

Yet every year on that eventful day in November a solemn silence is observed as a tribute to the Glorious Dead. Whether in sight of an unimposing little memorial in some village in Hampshire, or before the great cenotaph in Whitehall, men uncover their heads with equal respect and bend in prayer for those who fought to save this generation from destruction. Whether in Europe or Barbaria, a man would be without a soul if he remained unmoved by a sight so full of feeling and emotion, for that two-minute silence

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is the greatest prayer that man has collectively offered to his Creator since it was first said 'Let there be light.' But it is soon over: 'O God, our help in ages past' has been sung, Big Ben has struck, and the Last Post is sounded. A booming gun fires the second shot in the dim distance, and the great conglomeration of royalty, men of state, clergy, gentry, and common people dissembles to return to their normal work. The workmen in armament firms resume their construction of the weapons of destruction. The band of the Royal Fusiliers breaks into music, the mace-bearers dexterously wielding the golden rod to the strains of war-time melodies. Little faces smile as they look up into their parents' eyes; there is something in those songs that calls them; they feel as their parents did before. It is in their blood to follow. The time will come when they will be driven again; one knows not why or whither—but every day will then be for some poor home—in Europe or Barbaria—a day of mourning. For the next war will embrace humanity as it has never done before, and the children of our generation will be like the marked sheep, ready for the slaughter. They will be, as a short time Chancellor of

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Germany, said: ‘*Cannon-fodder*.’ This seems to be one of the reasons why in civilization children are produced.

Beverley Nichols, a writer, a pacifist, and an ex-President of the Oxford Union, once said: “There are plenty of people who will make every effort to see that children are drilled and given physical exercises and holidays in agreeable camps, on condition that they and their parents subscribe to the blood-and-thunder doctrines of the super-patriot. To me there is something quite revolting about that. It is like fattening children for the slaughter.

“Give me your arms, little boy, and I will make them strong, so that you may have steady hands for shooting! Give me your legs, little boy, and I will make them sturdy, so that you may not tire in your march against the enemy.”<sup>1</sup>

When a vulture eats its young, it is sheer animalism; some barbarians stew their offspring—that is cannibalism; but civilization feeds its children with special care before serving them as delicacies, like *cochons de lait*, at the great ban-

<sup>1</sup> The *Daily Herald*, January 15, 1935.

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queting feast of Mars—that is called patriotism.

Those who flaunt with impunity a red poppy in their buttonhole in memory of the dead are the same people who at Conservative conferences declare themselves emphatically in favour of re-armament. Their conception of civilization is a mere complex of distrusts and fears, and the Gentleman's word is implemented with fixed bayonets.

We are told that the Government of this country is untiring in its efforts to make civilization safe from destruction. Has not the Ministry of Transport speckled the towns with chequered beacons with knobs on? Cannot pedestrians now cross the streets of London without fear or compunction? What this insuperable fascination in England for having 'knobs on' represents only God and the psychologists know; to the barbarian this contradiction of making men safe from every danger of everyday life, and plunging them at any moment into greater and greater peril of a more devastating and harrowing destruction is beyond comprehension. However much he may hate civilization, he would not wish its destruction to be at the hands of war. A barbarian

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loves humanity too much to wish to see it destroyed along with his pet aversion. Yet the clouds in Europe will not easily lift, while the atmosphere is still wet and moist and the thirst for sensation remains unquenched.

“Sensation — 6.30 — sensation — 6.30 sensation”—and the voice of the newspaper seller will be heard for the last time. Enthusiastic at first, then panic-stricken, it will gradually die away, and with it will fade the voice of civilization as we have known it.



VI

THEIR POLITICIANS AND PRIME  
MINISTERS



## VI

### THEIR POLITICIANS AND PRIME MINISTERS<sup>1</sup>

The only sensible thing to do with barbarians when they get out of control is to shoot the louts. This, expressed perhaps somewhat crudely, is the keynote of Churchillism. What is this so-called Churchillism which is always being associated with Barbaria? Though never officially defined, Churchillism is universally understood. This '-ism' is a product of this century, taking its name from one who has played both a great and a pathetic part in the history of English and Imperial politics. Churchillism, however, does not begin and end with Right Honourable Gentleman from whom it derives its name. A whole crowd of minor luminaries hang from this great chandelier. But the figure that predominates it overshadows

<sup>1</sup> Parts of this chapter are reproduced from the author's article on 'Churchillism' in the *Isis*, for which he is grateful to the editor.

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any of the hangings. With years, this chandelier has lost in brilliance. The cut-glass is beginning to show signs of wear.

It may perhaps appear impertinent for a barbarian to venture to criticize the politics of one who has held and distinguished himself in various high offices of State. But Churchillism is so impertinent in itself, so conceited in its dogmas, so self-assured in its righteousness, that by no code of etiquette or public morals can any attack on it be called unjustified. When those whose knowledge of Barbarian dates back as far as 18—or whose vision extends to the narrow paths of a Civil Service, which they served so faithfully that they would not even look around—when men like these feel themselves sufficiently qualified to litter this country with their *dicta* and to speak on behalf of three hundred million odd barbarians, then there is no doubt that the apex of impertinence has been reached. Where is the impertinence of a barbarian in comparison to theirs ? And the very fact that Churchillism has acquired for itself the status that it now occupies is itself of sufficient public importance to take criticism beyond the pale of personal enmity.

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A word must be said about the master mind that is behind Churchillism. Without the slightest hesitation, one admits the greatness of the man who is the inspiration of this abstraction. Even the harshest critics of this scion of Marlborough will not grudge him his great talents. A first-class speaker, a most brilliant writer, great capacity for work, tremendous courage, loyalty, and devotion to whatever cause he may be advocating, an unflinching sincerity in his utterances—these are some of his characteristics which even a barbarian is forced to admit. Yet there is material out of this one life from which a great tragedy could be written. For he was born with an insatiable ambition, a lust for power and greatness that can only be compared with a Tamburlaine, and an instinct for perseverance that breaks every law of human patience. The tragedy of it all was that he never got half as near to the greatness to which he aspired. There was always something wanting that prevented him from being a leader of men. And that something was within himself—it was inborn in his character. It has been said of him that "he wishes that life should be one great tragedy and that he himself should be in the

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centre of it." That is the keynote of Churchillism. What harm may be inflicted on others *en passant* is in Churchillism a minor detail.

It is no wonder then, that from an early age the barbarian has had an inborn repulsion for all that Churchillism stood for. For Churchillism is far from what is best in the English character. In every sphere of life it takes an attitude which is incompatible with the trend of modern thought and opinion. In international affairs it stands for armaments for an exaggerated idea of security, which goes to increase the large sense of distrust in which international affairs are already soaked. In their home policy, it is the attitude of the gentleman lounging in his West End Club while hundreds of thousands of his fellow-men have barely the means of sustenance. It is in its policy with regard to Barbaria, however, that Churchillism acts with a vengeance, dogging the progress of that country at every stage of its history, pouring its venom on those whose money provided the very salt of their existence, kept them clothed and educated their children. It is therefore men like these—men who follow the banner of Churchillism—that are to be blamed for the bitterness which

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has emanated from the controversy. And when these men—men of infinite resources and endowed by nature with great gifts—use their power and their talent to further Churchillism, there can be no epitaph more appropriate than “Iago, Iago, the pity of it, Iago !”

“Shoot the louts ! Well, not really, but do the next best thing.” Would that not be the heart’s desire of many people who call themselves civilized—those hearts of iron, those sinews warped in thick skin or an old school tie ? To say that this is the attitude of every Englishman towards Barbaria would be distinctly unfair; to say that it is the inner latent desire of a great section who regard themselves as incarnations of Deity and Civilization may only be an exaggeration of a vital truth.

There are in politics many benevolent gentlemen, with the peace of the wur-r-r-l'd very much at heart. In the ordinary course of events this position is held by several gentlemen in turns, varying with the party that has the larger majority in Parliament. Recently, however, there has been in England a flare of what in vulgar parlance is called ‘the professional status.’ There are rumours

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in high official circles that there will henceforth be two Prime Ministers—the Permanent and the Parliamentary, to correspond to the two similar—amateur and professional—types of Under-Secretaries of State. The Permanent Prime Minister will not be a partisan in politics. “Nation before Party” will appear on his coat-of-arms. He will take no active part in politics, intervening only on rare and special occasions to express national points of view. He will not be responsible to Parliament, in fact he will have no responsibility at all. He will continue to live at Chequers, coming to town for the week-ends. He will be no ordinary tub-thumper, but one of those few statesmen who can make a clear and lucid generalization on any abstract or hypothetical subject. Once he has made his point clear, he will not bother to finish his sentences. A halo of mysticism will always be around his unfinished symphonies, and as in Schubert’s case, no one will ever know what was in his mind. The whole purpose of his office will be to stay the hasty hand of legislation, so as to give every member of Parliament time to think things over. The Statute of Chequers by which this

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office will be officially recognized will be a one-clause Bill, reading:

"Postponement will be the post-prandial preoccupation of post-Victorian Permanent Prime Ministers."

Therefore there is no immediate danger of barbarians being shot in the near future. Besides, there is always kindly, gracious Mother of Parliaments! That beautiful Gothic structure, rebuilt in the early half of the nineteenth century, stands somewhere in the heart of Westminster, "untouched by the storm which in its fury has uprooted some of the mightiest trees in Europe", and safe from the fires that have accidentally but decisively burned down similar structures on the Continent, zealously guarding that part of the sovereign power which is its heritage, and that non-existent democracy, surmounted only by its own despotism and Big Ben, tapering at the top, yet typically English in that it has knobs on, and casting its spacious shadow not only on Parliament Square, but across Westminster Bridge on to the L.C.C., the stronghold or camp where Socialists concentrate, and across the seas, over the wide open spaces of nature and the Dominions,

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over Everest and Barbaria.

In the debating hall of this grand palace of Westminster the greatest orators argue out the policies on which depend the future, not only of England and the Empire, but of civilization itself. Therefore, little barbarian, so long as there is kindly, gracious Mother of Parliaments to watch over you, death will have no sting. It may be necessary to drop a bomb here and a bomb there in order to maintain law and order on your frontier, and preserve peace and goodwill among the people of Barbaria, but do not be alarmed. It is only an assurance of the continual benediction that is showered upon you. For you too, must move with the times. In these days when civilized man has conquered the heavens and science has made miracles possible, the fruits of civilization must drop from above, even as manna once did and was the fashion. Therefore, as you bend on suppliant knee and raise your hands, a few explosive fireworks will descend on you in answer to your prayer. They call them 'bombs' in this century. And looking down from the cockpit of his Bristol Fighter on the Lilliputians speckled like ants over the vast

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expanse below, the kindly aircraftsman will say to himself: "There are our young barbarians all at play." When civilization takes itself to abnormal height, it can hardly be expected to get any but a distorted view of reality. For when a child has been born on a battlefield and grown up amid the booming of guns, and played with corpses and dug up graves to make its toy castles, play may not be such fun, after all.

We have always failed to understand why God should give to the barbarian his life, and to civilization the right to make a mockery of it!



VII  
THEIR CRAZE FOR SPORT



## VII

### THEIR CRAZE FOR SPORT

Sport is one of the essentials of civilization. The overcrowding of newspapers with sporting news and gossip is the direct result of this misguided enthusiasm, which is based on the hero-worship of brawn. But what else can be expected of a people who in all sincerity believe that Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton and Harrow, and that the alleged decadence of Oxford and the consequent 'loosening of the moral fibre' are to be traced to their consecutive defeats in a boat race? The fan-mail of a human colossus, who knocked out a slightly lesser colossus, because his eye was 'gashed' in an unlucky moment in the fourth round, is far greater than that of any of the greatest brains in England. Elderly gentlemen, with one foot already in the grave, stimulate what Mr. James Douglas would call 'The Savage in them' by turning on their radio sets to listen to

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a broadcast of the fight; little typists relieve the monotony of their daily routine by indulging in the cheap thrill of buying a picture postcard of their favourite 'he-man'; and at the stadium itself, where hundreds of thousands of enthusiasts are packed like sardines, little girls from beauty parlours are to be heard shouting themselves hoarse, "Come on, green pants!"

Where is it all leading to? The recruitment of men for the Colonial and Foreign Services is based to some extent on their performance in College and Varsity sports. If participation in sport was merely regarded as a sign of health in the men that are to be sent to the far-flung outposts of the Empire, in order better to withstand malaria and the sun, to neither of which they are in civilization accustomed, it is a fairly reasonable attitude of mind on the part of the Selection Board. But to glorify sport to an extent which goes even beyond hero-worship is not understandable in a people that call themselves civilized. This idea of hero-worship is first instilled into the boy—if he has not already inherited it at birth—at the early and impressionable stage of the prep. school. It is the secret of success later on at the

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Public School and the Varsity, and whatever may be his vocation or calling in life, he carries this over-exaggerated craze for sport always with him. This Mania is not restricted to the men alone. It spreads into the family—and even works its way into Society with the capital 'S'.

Indulging in the extravagance of a Society paper, the barbarian reads glowing accounts of delicate damsels, who were "Among those present at the Harrow *v.* Eton Match at Lord's." There is also a front-page picture of the Hon. Penelope Virginia Dandelion-Blossom, the prettiest débütante of the year. A little farther it reads: "She wore a new creation of bizarre baize and blue burlesque from Bitz of Bond Street." Alliterations are contagious, and one is inclined to say she probably postured on the pitch as a feature of frivolity by flaunting her flippant frock in a feeble effort to frolic! A person was then heard to exclaim, 'I object.' From this the barbarian, unaware of the application of the remark, naturally concluded that this had something to do with 'bodyline,' to which there has recently been so much objection from Australia. The meaning of the term 'bodyline' had never been clearly

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understood by the barbarian. He was once told that it was cricket, but that the controversy had nothing to do with the game called by the same name. It was apparently the principle of the thing that matters, for now that 'playing cricket' has become an idiom in the English language, one has got to know what it stands for. The whole controversy was therefore based more on the idiom than the original game, and Englishmen hated the idea that Australians should dictate to them the meaning of an English idiom.

On the slightest provocation enthusiastic reporters dash to the nearest telephone-Box to ring up their respective news-editors. A special correspondent who has been rushed thousands of miles to Australia takes most of the space on the front and back pages of the morning paper, which is covered with reports of interviews with prominent Australians, and exclusive wireless pictures of cricketers and kangaroos. From his London office, the editor himself has telephoned everybody who is anybody and drafted his leader page from their random utterances. Even the advertisement columns are reserved for the manufacturers of

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cricket goods, and 'bodyline' is the one topic of conversation.

The repercussions of all this are manifold. Empire Free Trade Shares have dropped two points at the closing, and someone is trying to corner the market. The cabinet resigns in Australia; some politicians are murdered, others just perish. In fact, everything turns to Ashes. In England the captains of half a dozen counties resign and show their disapproval of the whole affair by playing golf over the week-end. Even little Penelope Virginia Dandelion-Blossom, whose engagement with Prince Boguski was recently announced, is sitting heartbroken in her Park Lane mansion, her father having withdrawn his consent to their marriage, because the young suitor had the audacity to accuse his prospective father-in-law of bowling bodyline at the Annual Match between the City Veterans and the Borstal Yokels. This was the last straw, because these clubs are some of the most exclusive in London, and, as in the case of the Cad's Club, the name is no indication of its membership.

The matter has now reached a crisis, and questions are therefore asked in the House of Com-

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mons. The Dominion Secretary gives his assurance that the whole affair has received his utmost consideration and that our relations with Australia will continue friendly. This is the last word, and there is therefore no further cause for alarm. Armament shares, which had risen slightly during the bodyline boom, drop to their normal level, and the Prince and Princess Boguski are happily honeymooning in the South of France, having been united with full parental consent. Calm is restored in England, and weather forecasts provide the normal topic of conversation. Then, for no apparent reason, Mr. James Douglas on his own initiative—without even the slightest suggestion or the minutest particle of hint from the Postmaster-General—insists on everybody writing immediately to their mothers ! Everybody thinks this has got something to do with a financial crisis and the balancing of the Budget, so, being British, everybody does. The post office is unable to cope with the abnormal rush, and pleads for early posting, which is normally only associated with Christmas, when everybody usually writes to everybody's mothers. So the argument of the civilized man is that from whatever angle

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you look at civilization, you will find that every aspect of it has its germ in sport !

Being by now more than familiar with the meaning and significance of bodyline, the barbarian embarks on a careful study of the touchline. This requires a detailed knowledge of the game of rugger, the rules of which, although simple to the civilized man are somewhat complicated to the barbarian, whose mind is limited in its grasping power. The whole idea of the game is based on the theory that one has got to draw the line somewhere, and the main object of the players is to exceed their bounds, and the glory is greater or less with the number of ribs that are broken in the attempt. A sportsman's modesty requires that the successful crossing of the touchline should only be called a 'try'. Again even in rugger, one must—idiomatically speaking—'play cricket,' because although these two games are entirely different, the idiom applies to both. Two teams of fifteen a side play against each other. They are usually distinguished by the colour of their shorts, because not only is it essential that little girls from beauty parlours, whose enthusiasm for rugger is as keen as it is for boxing,

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should be able to expand their lungs by cheering 'green pants,' but as most of the tackling is done below the waistline, the players are better able to concentrate on the game. No doubt the barbarian gets slightly muddled between the waistline, the touchline, and the bodyline. The difference was once explained to me by an Englishman, whose knowledge of both games was beyond average, but, simple as it might have been, I was unable to grasp it. The explanation is, however, worthy of being faithfully reproduced here. He said: "The waistline is the principal feature of the tackle in rugger, and the attack is largely directed at the body; but this must not be confused with bodyline. Bodyline in cricket is ungentlemanly because the ball is deliberately aimed at the body with intent to cause or without reasonable care to avoid, injury and this is not cricket—idiomatically speaking, of course—but in rugger the ball is not thrown at the body, therefore it is cricket. Thus stated the rules and purposes of the two games are easily distinguished." As this cannot be satisfactorily translated into any vernacular, the lack of understanding of this clear and lucid enunciation of the game must be put down

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to an insufficient knowledge of English.

I can almost recollect—it must be a long time now—how I sat and listened to a distinguished rugger player who, during a visit to Barbaria, gave a lecture for the benefit of little barbarian boys, in the hope that it would instil in them the English spirit. The lecture was announced as being on ‘*Esprit de Corps*.’ I attended it because I translated it to mean ‘the spirit of a corpse’, and as a child I was always enthusiastic about things that were quite beyond me. Imagine how disillusioned I was to find it was a lecture on rugger-simplified-for-barbarians. I cannot lay my hands on my note-book of lectures, but I should imagine it must have read something like this: “Of the fifteen in the full rugger team some play forward, and some play back, so that when the ball is in play it is continually going backwards and forwards. But when half-way between these two stages, the three-quarters come into play. Only the referee can whistle on the field, and that is done when there is any argument as to where the ball really is. It is settled by pushing, which is called ‘the scrum.’ A short rest is given to the players half-way through the game, and light

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refreshments are served in this interval. If you get hurt it's bad luck, but whether your side wins or loses you must shout 'Hip, Hip, Hooray.' That is *esprit de corps.*'' There is, therefore, great scope for an authoritative treatise on 'Rugger, simplified for the barbarian.'

What this craze for sport must be can be judged from the gate-money which a football match can fetch. Forty and fifty thousand spectators in more than one part of the country flock every Saturday during the season to see a League or a Cup match. The Cup Final always breaks all previous records. And this great crowd of civilized humanity yells and cheers, or boos and hisses, as the ball is kicked by one player to another, and the whole place goes up in a tremendous uproar as a goal is *about to be* scored. No one has ever ventured to describe the game after that stage. It would be humanly impossible. It is said that the real enthusiasts queue up days before the match, so that when they finally do get there, they can relax in a comfortable seat and indulge in the luxury of a gentle nap before the game. Charabancs from all parts of the country bring cartloads of supporters for each side. Some

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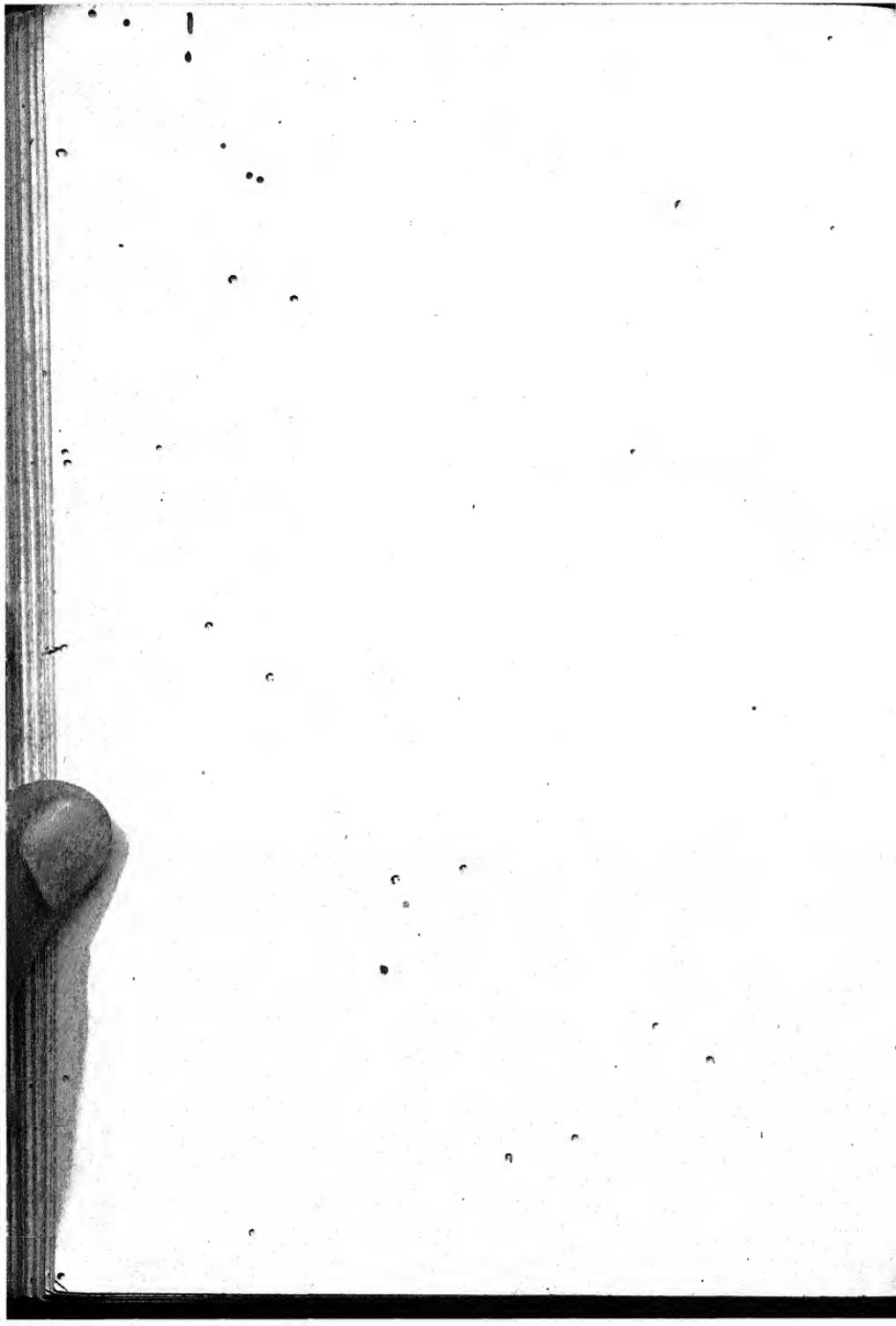
have saved up for weeks to be able to pay their bus fare and the entrance; for many it is a whole week's wage; but such is the craze for sport in civilization that people would rather forego a few comforts of life than miss seeing their favourite team perform.

If the legend of Waterloo has any foundation of truth and the victories of England in the past have been won on the little playgrounds of Eton and Harrow, where will the Stadia of Wembley and Twickenham and the grounds of the Oval and Lord's lead this civilization? Eugenics will some day gloat over its triumphs at seeing swaggering tomboys couple with tough he-men, bulging with muscles and sinews, to bear fruit to the greater glorification of that same civilization. It is the only natural outcome of such a craze for sport.



VIII

THEIR NEGLECT OF FAMINE ALLEY



## VIII

### THEIR NEGLECT OF FAMINE ALLEY

Beverley Nichols once said: "I suppose one ought to be thinking of the Empire and statistics, and the cost to the State of the sick, and all that, and I'm sure these things are very important. But the thought of them doesn't 'get' me in the same way as the thought of Sally, leaning against a sooty wall, looking up to the clouds and wondering why they are so far away. If I could take that expression off her face, I should feel I hadn't lived in vain,"<sup>1</sup>: But Sally is only a symbol of those men and women to whom life—if this term can at all be applied to them—is a mere going on and on, a drifting from day to day, long after they are virtually dead.

Where is Famine Alley? People are apt to regard it as a solitary street somewhere in London, existing in isolation from the rest of civilization,

<sup>1</sup> The *Daily Herald*, January 15th 1935.

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and which the kind tolerance of the more fortunate has saved from destruction. I had often heard at a sumptuous dinner party in a pompous host exclaim that all the poverty in England was to be seen at night on the lonesome promenade of the Embankment, and that this was the true guide to the state of unemployment and poverty in civilization. My opportunity came on a clear February night, when I stepped out of the House of Commons, where from the gallery I had been attentively listening to civilization debating on the Means Test. The weather had been exceptionally mild, and so I strolled along the Embankment. But there were no noticeable signs of down-and-outs loitering under the open sky, resting their weary limbs on hard wooden benches till the hand of the law shook them from their slumber and moved them on. It was quiet and peaceful, and more like a poet's corner than a famine alley. That particular night had made the Thames look more beautiful than, with its muddy waters, it might in reality be. In the distance, little lights twinkled on the desolate wharves across the way, and a few sundry stars helped to improve the setting. It was a photographer's dream picture—a chequered

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symphony in light and shade. Across the river was the great but uninspiring edifice of the London Country Council, and behind me the silhouette of Big Ben against the sky, with the dial of the clock illuminated, made the picture complete. Only tramcars with their rattle broke the quiet peace of a perfect night. Such life as there was, consisted chiefly of a few cabmen chatting together or playing cards in a sheltered alcove, a bobby or two on beat anxiously killing time, waiters from neighbouring hotels and clubs retiring from night duty, and a few nocturnal stragglers, who were far from being down and out. Trafalgar Square looked very desolate, and the crypt in St. Martin-in-the-Fields turned out to be rather over-done in the guide-books. A red light shone outside the church to indicate that accommodation was exhausted and that a free bed was no longer available. Inside there were poor, thin, skimpy, half-starved, specimens of humanity huddled together under such shelter as this house of God could provide for those who were too impoverished to afford to pay for a bed and, rather than sleep under the open sky in defiance of the elements, chose to cluster in

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the crypt of St. Martin. Although in a church, they might well have called themselves the Confraternity of the Faithless. But even this is not a fair appraisement of poverty in England. And Famine Alley is not an offshoot of Trafalgar Square. Yet those whom life has given a silver spoon at birth, seem to imagine that a few coppers thrown at a few fellow-creatures in that neighbourhood is sufficient to appease the conscience of the rich and allay the sufferings of the poor.

Five years ago—long before people talked glibly, as they do now so fashionably, of a depression—I was asked to join a small party to tour England, Scotland, and Wales. I was then barely a few months on this island of civilization and, in my eagerness to see the country, jumped at the offer. I am ashamed to say that it was intended by my host to be a luxurious motor drive in his new sports-tourer, a splendid creation in chromium and beige, and the early stages of the tour across the West of England and Wales naturally created a great impression. But working up North a different picture presented itself to us. What spirits the party may have been elated to during the first few days were completely crushed

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as we left the Lakes and emerged into the heart of the industrial area. No one could speak very much, for the atmosphere was not conducive to enlightened conversation. There was a general feeling of discomfort, and the host was particularly anxious to avoid that dark and dismal chapter in an otherwise picturesque drive, and if possible would rather have evaded it; for it was like following in grim silence in a funeral procession, with this difference that what we felt was not sorrow for one dead man who was being carried to his grave, but for the hundreds of men and women who, though dead, still contrived to live in the grim area through which we penetrated. It was a nightmare, for the picture as it presented itself to us was horrid and fearful. Yet we stopped and looked around. Men gaping with mouths open, panting through sheer hunger, knocked so senseless that they were too unconscious to realize what was going on around them. This may not be an accurate picture of England, but it was an impressionist's view of Famine Alley. Hope to the men seemed as far away as the clouds were to Sally.

Yet what has civilization done for these un-

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employed who stand two million strong ? The only aid that it has to offer is patronage in the shape of the dole and Means Test. Perhaps a charitably inclined noble Lady—using this last word in a strictly technical sense—might organize a Charity Ball in the spacious banqueting rooms of the New Babylon, whose facade will once more be brilliantly illuminated and decorated with gold and silver hangings, with an awning erected to prevent a drop or two of rain from spoiling the expensive robes in which these patrons and donors will be clad. Perhaps a pageant will be organized to relieve the monotony of the dance and present the picturesque view of poverty as they have envisaged it. A real live Duchess, who only that morning has had her hair or her wig 'permed' and waved for the occasion, and undergone a special beauty treatment to suit that particular shade of lighting which will predominate at this charitable function, will clad herself in a few rags hired from Clarkson's for the occasion, and as the curtain goes up and the spotlight is fixed on her, she will descend from a constructed stage and walk along the length of the ballroom, only to change into her usual becoming robes in the ladies' cloak-room

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at the other end. Applause will follow applause, and everyone will feel that the cause of the poor, for which they have inconvenienced themselves by paying two guineas for dancing and supper, is after all a deserving one. And for this farce or this self-delusion, weeks will be spent in rehearsal and in discussion over the garments which will be most conducive to moving the sedate spectators to tears. More than a hundred Society women will have their names placarded as patrons and donors, and an equal number will serve on the Committee. There will be a President and a Vice-President, a Chairman and a Vice-Chairman, and an advertisement Committee which will be the only Committee that will function at all. Fifty other less important women in Society will form the Pageant Committee, and as if not enough, fifty giggling debs. and ex-debs., with their usual air of *lèse-majesté*, will constitute the Young Committee. The programme—the *pièce de résistance*—will announce that the Duchess or the Marchioness or the Viscountess of...will be Queen of the Dole! The tone of condescension which Society adopts on such occasions, and the hypocrisy which permeates all such charitable func-

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tions, is sufficiently nauseating even to us uncouth barbarians.

It was Sunday afternoon in Hyde Park and, as is the custom, a whole row of demagogues were thumping their ill-constructed platforms till the whole construction shook from their very foundations and was in constant danger of collapse. A peculiar assortment of speakers gathered to deliver their 'message' to those who in reality had prepared themselves for a free entertainment of comedy and burlesque. The Salvation Army was indulging in Community Singing, while a few feet away a Moslem student was trying to convince a handful of his own fellow-countrymen and a couple of stray policemen that divorce was easier in Islam than in Christianity. And between these two stands of opposing faith, on a rostrum surmounted by the red flag, was a middle-aged man discoursing of International Socialism. His audience far outnumbered the combined audiences on both flanks, and never before was a more scathing and bitter attack on Civilization and Society delivered by a man who was obviously a genuine product of the working-class. He wore a black hat, with a slightly broader brim than usual, and

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his voice rose and fell more appropriately than is usual with speakers in Hyde Park. There was no doubt whatever that his utterances were sincere and the outcome of grievances which he and his fellow-workers had nursed for a long time.

If the noble ladies who featured in the pageant as Queens of the Dole and of the Means Test had only stepped out of the New Babylon to hear his utterances, they would have thought twice before landing their patronage a second time to charitable performances. They might not have been in 'the best of taste,' but justified beyond doubt their inclusion in the most select anthology of Invective and Abuse. His satire was very effective. Amongst other things he said: "Who are those that at night chase 'birds' in Piccadilly? Workers!—no one else could afford to. Who are thoses strange creatures we hear of, called 'Pansies'? Workers! When I first came to the Park men were called men, now they call 'em 'pensies.'" And so he rambled on in his own way, ending up with a peroration in which he raised his voice to a pitch which was slightly beyond him, with the inevitable result that the anti-climax came where the climax should ordinarily

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have been, but it could still have made the flesh of the parasites of Mayfair creep. The man was cleverer than he made himself out to be. He knew the art of keeping his audience sufficiently alive with interesting digressions, which interspersed his subtle spreading of propaganda. It was the voice of Famine Alley raised to denounce the civilization in which it had unfortunately been born—for the main point of his argument was the disproportionate attention civilization paid to the trivialities of life, while its more vital problems were being shamefully neglected. His illustrations were deliberately ridiculous. With great sarcasm he discoursed on the importance of deciding which way men of fashion will crease their trousers next season; his comparisons, which kept the audience in continuous humour, were effective in driving home his main argument.

There is no doubt in a barbarian's mind which of these two is the more human—the rough, spontaneous utterance of an uncivilized working man, or the sophisticated, hollow dilettantism of the Upper Ten. Time alone will tell how the voice of Famine Alley, crude and uncultured as it may be, will one day eclipse the voice of civiliza-

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tion, and the wailing and moaning of hungry England will fade in the distance, when the hangings are stripped from the facades of the New Babylon, and the clouds will seem nearer to Sally and mouths will not gape in vain for a beggar's meal.



IX  
SHOULD WE WRECK IT?

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## IX

### SHOULD WE WRECK IT ?

Yet civilization continues to exist in the name of God's chosen people. That God should be evoked to justify the existence of these ugly forms is little short of blasphemy. There is no doubt that, judged by their own standards, they are the chosen people, who have conquered nature by means of science and now sit on the top of the world. To them belong the greatest feats of intellect and reason, and to them goes the credit of picking up and turning to profit what other people in their stupidity had cast aside. Success has followed upon success, and to maintain their supremacy they diverted the course of the world into those channels in which they had the key positions, so that unless 'thought' itself was uprooted by a volcanic eruption they would continue to reign supreme. When one takes into account the materials with which they have built up this

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edifice, one admires the courage that was behind it. The Englishman has therefore some reason to be proud of his civilization.

To this pride of the English people can be traced some of their worst prejudices. A little urchin at a street corner once looked inquisitively at me, then turned to his pal of seven and in a low whisper uttered: 'Black man.' I never really blamed him. How should he know? There was something in his manner that made me feel there was no intention on his part to hurt, and that his was only an instinctive realization of a difference of colour which was the result of environment and surrounding. These children, who spend most of their early youth on the streets because their parents cannot be bothered to look after them, are told from early childhood that the presence of a coloured man is as dangerous as an infectious disease. Even grown-up children of decent families are told to avoid association with barbarians. To brush such prejudices aside, the child would have to go against his whole upbringing. The cause of this colour prejudice can be traced farther back than this century. It originates from the opportunities which the white

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people have had to exploit and to dominate over the coloured races. Success has stimulated their feeling of superiority, and they have acquired a self-assurance which borders on conceit, for they are far too conscious, not only of what they have done, but of what they can do. When pride is uncouched in modesty and becomes blatantly offensive to those whom circumstances or birth or environment have hindered from conforming to the requirements of civilization, the irony of nature invariably causes it to stoop. It is the story told of nearly every civilization which has perished that their decline or fall was to be traced to their insufferable pride and their insuperable arrogance. Great Persia, with the tales of its prowess, of its Rustoms and Sorabs, with its mighty civilization and its great Zarathushtra—where is it now? An Arab invasion routed the last vestiges of that great civilization. Proud Pharaohs, once entombed in their great pyramids must be finding cold comfort in the unassuming architecture of the Cairo-British Museum, for the lash that whipped a hundred thousand slaves to build a monument to their false pride will never be wielded again. The story of Rome is much the same. The monk of Clairvaux,

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St. Bernard, whom Gibbon quotes in his *Decline and Fall*, is unflinching in his scathing attack on the Romans; he says: "Who is ignorant of their vanity and arrogance? A nation nursed in sedition, cruel, untractable, and scorning to obey unless they are too feeble to resist. When they promise to serve they aspire to reign; if they swear allegiance, they watch the opportunity to revolt; yet they vent their discontent in loud clamours if your doors, or your counsels, are shut against them. Dexterous in mischief, they have never learnt the science of doing good. Odious to earth and heaven, impious to God, seditious among themselves, jealous of their neighbours, inhuman to strangers, they love no one, by no one are they beloved; and while they wish to inspire fear, they live in base and continual apprehension. They will not submit; they know how to govern; faithless to their equals, ungrateful to their benefactors, and alike imprudent in their demands and their refusals. Lofty in promise, poor in execution; adulation and calumny, perfidy and treason are familiar arts of their policy." As Gibbon confesses, "...this dark portrait is not coloured by the pencil of Christian charity,

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yet the features, however harsh and ugly, express a lively resemblance to the Romans of the twelfth century."

How that pride must have felt when, having risen to such heights, it fell and was levelled and crushed on the face of the earth, human imagination can hardly picture. This idea of the fall of greatness is to be found in a mild form dramatized by the pre-Shakespeareans. It was their conception of tragedy. But the story was never told by people who fell. It was written much later by some playwright who, digging in the archives, found in it material for drama.

Although the greatest haters of this civilization are aware that its downfall would involve the massacre of innocents, yet it is not too fatuous to contemplate the decline and fall of the civilization of these chosen people. Nature sometimes turns and takes its vengeance on those who have tampered too much with its normal course and who are too proud to respect its laws. For there is no right, human or divine, which justifies the attitude of civilization in maintaining that the life of one man in the East is less precious than that of one man in the West; if bombing is

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inhuman in the civilized world, it is as inhuman on the North-West Frontier Provinces of Barbaria, and the shooting of louts is no exception to the Sixth Commandment. Civilization differentiates in the question of liberty and the right to govern who applied to itself and when applied to barbarians. If these are worth preserving in England, they are equally worth fighting for in Barbaria.

That story of a decline and fall would be the greatest tragedy that man ever put pen to paper to write. The 'proud' men of England—the Lord Lloyds and the Churchills and the thousand lesser lights whose self-complacency is akin to the pride of the Romans of the twelfth century—would find it a difficult tale to tell. Would it be told in the same strain as the *Life of Marlborough*? Would it have the vitriol which marks those speeches of the noble Lord and the Rt. Hon. Gentleman against giving freedom and home rule to Barbaria, and that fire and eloquence which has moved to great applause the two Houses of Parliament? What would be the feelings of a barbarian if there peered through the decorative windows of the bookshops of the world this unostentatious

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volume on whose dust-cover two such famous names appeared at the same time? There would be no need for the publisher to litter the cover with extracts of reviews of their earlier works; nor in the style of Mr. Guedalla's last chapter on the Duke, would it be necessary to add: "First Baron Lloyd, sometime Governor of Bombay, ex-High Commissioner for Egypt, Privy Councillor..."; or in Mr. Churchill's case his even more innumerable qualifications. The book would be of sufficient interest to the world without the slightest advertisement. It would be the best seller that the publishing world has ever handled. This thought may be, as Gibbon says of St. Bernard, harsh and ugly and uncoloured by the pencil of Christian charity, yet it is not so far-fetched as to be impossible. Tragedy is usually not foreseen by those on whom it falls heavily.

I do not say that my barbaric civilization—if this is not a contradiction in terms—has everything to be desired. *Mother India*, by an American author, Katherine Mayo, was an eye-opener to the darkest aspects of it, which so many of us in our preoccupation had overlooked. It emphasized and exaggerated the worst that was in Barbaria to an

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extent which made even the trace of it something to be ashamed of. But we have been throughout barbarians—and have been regarded as such—and have never laid claims to be the chosen people to bring light to others. We have always been willing to learn and false pride was never one of our failings. And even if our life and existence are as dark as they as they have often been painted, it is no excuse for the existence in civilization of the things that one finds in it. For my purpose has not been to make a case for the barbarian or to propose any alternative form of civilization, but to wreck the somewhat overdone and exaggerated picture which civilization has been accustomed to paint of itself. It is intended to give a slight shock to the more smugly complacent among civilized people; to make hypocrites feel that their puritanism is not so opaque after all; to make prudes a little hesitant before lifting the finger of conventional morality at the so-called immoralities of Barbaria. We have had enough of it.

Yet ours is not a claim of superiority in civilization. It is rather, that there is not so much in the civilization of Englishmen which gives it an inherent right to thrust itself on us. Well might

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the Englishman say: "Have we not given you a new life and brought the joys of Heaven itself to the portals of your heathen home? Have we not conferred on you the benefits of science by building great architectural works and achieving by engineering feats what you, in your barbarism, would never have done in a thousand years? Have we not brought water in abundance, where nature had decreed there should only be a barren desert? Have we not invested our wealth in promoting commerce and in enriching the bowels of your country, till the earth itself was compelled to yield fruit? This is what our civilization has done for you, and yet ungrateful wretch, you want to wreck it." This might well be the speech of the prosecution charging the barbarian with attempting to wreck what civilization holds most precious—its own self.

Does it ever occur to him that the standards on which our two civilizations are based are entirely different in their essentials? One is based on intellect as denoted by science and reasoning, the other is based on feeling and emotion. So that, although we remain 'barbarians' by standards of the West, in feeling and emotion we are much

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more advanced. These qualities have not been seen in England after the Renaissance. One looks in vain for great art in modern England, as an expression of feeling, for art does not depend on a formula of chemical compounds. Either modern English art does not reflect the life of the people, in which case it is meaningless, or if it does, it reveals how devoid of feeling are the people by whom it is created, and how symbolic it is of the superficiality and the cadence which are the characteristic features of the civilization it represents. Civilization is too occupied with machinery and money, and the luxuries of modern invention, to bother about art any more. Science has ousted great art.

In point of time ours is the older civilization and the more ancient culture. Galsworthy makes the Jew in *Loyalties* say to Dancy the Englishman: "You called me a damned Jew. My race was old when you were all savages." The Indian has much more right to say to the English: "You call us barbarians, but we were cultured and refined and had a civilization when you were still grovelling in the dust. We had feeling and emotion long before these senses were known to the West."

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This we still have. It is the soul of a great people. The glamorous Taj enshrines the woman who was 'The Light of Asia'; so this emotionalism to this soul may be hidden somewhere in the dark and disenchanted metaphysics of the East. It may be buried and entombed but in the East it always will be, until its people will once more feel the urge of living life fully, deeply, and efficiently, Christ rightly said: "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" But one cannot talk of a soul in this century without provoking a guffaw or a gentle titter of scorn.

Therefore, what we ask of you is to look at your own civilization, as we barbarians have seen it, to try to feel some of your deep-rooted prejudices come out against your own selves as they have come out against us, and to put yourselves in the position most barbarians have always been in "Only those who have lived in a state of inequality will understand what I mean—workers, European Jews, women...those who have felt their status, their race, or their sex a bar to a complete share in all that the world has to offer."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Paul Robeson.

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What binds us to these people, what makes us feel for your famine alley, for the pathetic figure of the cabman taking shelter under the coffee-stall, and even for Germaine under her street-lamp on a cold winter evening, is the same feeling of repulsion for the hypocrisy and the superficiality that calls itself civilization, and the same feeling of indignation at the unjust prejudices which have emanated from it. It may have brought to us the Sukkur Barrage and other such great achievements of science and engineering, it may even have made Everest accessible, but it has never treated us as human beings. The finer the education of the barbarian and the more refined his culture, the more reason has he to resent the patronizing attitude of civilization to his people. His faith in himself is shaken, and even when most sure of himself his manner is somewhat tentative. It causes a bitterness in him which he carries all through his life.

One of the more illuminating events of the year is the return of Paul Robeson to his people. To us the story has more value than the parable of the Prodigal Son. Robeson does not return to his Barbaria as the unsuccessful wastrel, who

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has no other alternative. He goes back to it when he is at the top of his career. He reached the heights of success, not through the kind tolerance of civilized people, but in spite of their prejudices. In an article he wrote for the *Daily Herald*:<sup>1</sup> he says: "...most negroes desire nothing so much as to prove their equality with the white man—*on the white man's ground*." There is little question of doubt that he has proved it. Yet success did not convert him to long for the so-called 'joys of civilization.' His superiority proved, he would rather go back to where he came from. This does not mean a return to Africa, it means a return to his 'barbarism'—for Indians and Africans are in the eyes of civilization all barbarians. "Where I live is not important. But I am going back to my people in the sense that for the rest of my life I am going to think and feel like an African—not as a white man." He goes on to say in the same article that "the negroes will remain sterile until they recognize their cultural affinity with the East." Therefore, he would rather that their students should go to Palestine

<sup>1</sup> January 5th, 1938.

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and Pekin than come to the Sorbonne and Oxford, because the flowering of their inherent qualities would only be possible under sympathetic influences. He would borrow technology from the West, believing as he does that the race "which first learns to balance the intellectual and the ~~emo~~-tional—to use the machines and couple them with a life of true intuition and feeling such as the Easterners know—will produce the supermen."

So that the East remains the stronghold of emotion, as the West is of the intellect; and the great pity is that we of the East whose emotionalism has so much scope for development are neglecting it for the acquirement of qualities wholly unsuited to our character. This is as looked at from our point of view, in so far as we are guilty of aping the English. How much more unfair it is for those, who are in a position to thrust their civilization, so devoid of the emotional, on to ours, which has always been steeped in it, and thus to crush its essential feature, is only the mild complaint of a barbarian. It is not a case of persuading us to be civilized; it is, as Chesferton might have said, compelling us to be cads.

